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Lovell's International Series

The Bishops' Bible

BY

DAVID CHRISTIE MURRAY

AND

HENRY HERMANN

NEW YORK

JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

150 WORTH STREET, CORNER MISSION PLACE

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THE BISHOPS' BIBLE

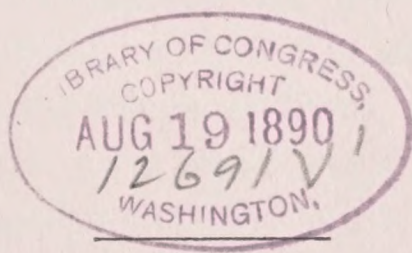
THE BISHOPS' BIBLE

A Novel

BY

D. CHRISTIE MURRAY AND HENRY HERMAN

AUTHORIZED EDITION



NEW YORK
JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

142 TO 150 WORTH STREET

1890

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M962B1

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THE BISHOPS' BIBLE.

CHAPTER I.

A SMOCK-FROCKED yokel, seated on a doorstep before a house in the main street of Thorbury town, slept with his mouth wide open in the shadow on a dazzling summer day. A dog, of no determinable breed, lay opposite to him in the sunshine, yawning idly and luxuriously at intervals. The two had the main street to themselves, and not another sign of life was visible anywhere. The rustic was lank and lean, with pointed knees and a nose like a pen. He falsified the *ex pede Herculem* theory completely, for his feet would have carried Goliath of Gath, whilst the stockingless ankles which showed above his monstrous boots were of an astonishing tenuity. He had huge hands, browned with dirt and labor, depending from wrists so thin as to seem hardly able to carry them, and his shoulders were narrow and sloping, and seemed to shamble even in his sleep.

He was curled up in a complete abandonment to slumber, resting his weight equally upon the door-jamb and the door, so that when the latter opened suddenly and without warning, he fell backwards, and a bulky man hurrying from the house half trod upon him, stum-

bled over him, and with difficulty saved himself from a headlong plunge into the roadway. The smock-frocked man gave evidence of an unusual lung power, despite his narrow shoulders, and yelled as if he were being murdered, the breedless dog, excited by the suddenness of the incident, barked like mad, and a score of people ran to doors and windows.

"Get up, you groveller!" said the bulky man, hoisting the rustic with his foot. "What d'ye mean by tumbling backwards into *my* house?" There was a thoroughly rustic egotism in the emphasis on the personal pronoun. Obviously the owner of the smock-frock might have tumbled backwards into the houses of any number of other people without the bulky man being in the least degree afflicted.

"I went to sleep, gaffer," returned the yokel, gathering himself together, and rubbing at his trodden shoulder.

"You went to sleep, did ye?" retorted the owner of the house. He was a florid-complexioned, surly man, with a ponderous figure, and dressed in decent black. He wore a shining silk hat, too small for his big dogmatic head, and kept it in place by an almost unceasing series of gymnastic movements. He was clean-shaven, and wore high-standing collars and a satin stock. His face was full of a dogged and ill-conditioned resolution, and he glared at the unintentional intruder with an emphasis of disapproval which the other's offence hardly seemed to call for.

"Yes, Mr. Stringer," said the yokel humbly, "I sat down to rest a bit, and it seems I must ha' fell into a doze."

"And I should like to know," said Mr. Stringer, "what call a honest young man — a honest young man,

mind you, Jonah Wood; a young man as earns his livin' fair and square — I should like to know what call such a young man has got to fall asleep at noontide, not havin' risen from his nightly bed more than these six hours? Answer me that, Jonah Wood. Where did you spend last night?"

Jonah Wood stooped to pick up his battered billy-cock hat, which lay between the other's feet upon the upper doorstep. He stared into the crown of it as if in search of something there, and moved his big feet uneasily on the pavement.

"Wheer did you spend last night, Jonah?" Stringer asked again. The threatening nod with which he accompanied this query dislodged his hat, but he recovered it by a movement of the most brilliant dexterity, as if he practised a game of cup-and-ball reversed.

"In bed, gaffer," answered Jonah, with a leering upward look, half fawning and half humorous.

"Some o' the time," said Stringer, "doubtless. But the rest?"

"Why, wheer should I spend the rest, gaffer?" Jonah demanded, with a display of innocence, altogether too transparent.

"Ah! wheer, to be sure, Jonah?" cried the bulky man disdainfully, setting his hat at a score of dangerous angles as he nodded at the offender. "Wheer, to be sure, if not in the squire's preserves?"

"Theer it is, gaffer," said Jonah, setting his hat upon his head and waving both hands abroad with an air of innocence gone desperate. "Give a dog a bad name and hang him. What is theer in the market in the way o' game at this here time o' year, the very height o' blazing midsummer?"

"Young and well-grown birds," answered Stringer. "Now, let's have no lies. Many's the plantation you've helped to stock out of Mr. Marmaduke's stores."

"Gaffer," said the rustic, "it might go hard with thee, if I was to make thee prove thy words. I've had squire's keepers watchin' me this last five 'ear. If theer was anythin' agen me d'ye think they wouldn't ha' nailed me long ago?"

"Niver you fear fer that, Jonah," the other answered with an angry chuckle, "they'll find ya yet, and lay you by the heels. And listen to this, my lad, if it's needful for you to sleep in broad daylight on anybody's doorstep, choose somebodys else's. I've a mind t' inflict chastisement on ye now, an' if ever I catch thee again I'll do it. I might ha' broke my neck over your clumsy body a minute back. March now, and let's have no more words about it."

Jonah touched the billycock hat with one great finger in token of submission, and shambled off. The cur, who had looked on attentively with one ear cocked back, and one eye half closed, as if prepared, if need were, to give a philosophic and balanced judgment on the case, suddenly ceased to be interested, and went off on three legs after his master.

During the whole of the colloquy, a prettyish, country-fied girl, with pink cheeks and a pink dress which matched them pleasantly, had stood shrinking in the hall. She wore a straw hat and thread gloves, and carried a sunshade, and was evidently bound for out-of-doors.

"That chap," said the sullen man, turning upon her as Jonah disappeared, "is just about ripe for the gallows."

"Yes, father," said the prettyish girl in pink.

"He'll come to a bad end, that chap will. You mark what I am saying."

"Yes, father," said the prettyish girl again.

"Now come along, and shut the door behind you," said papa.

"Yes, father," the girl responded meekly for the third time.

"Things is coming to a nice pass in Thorbury," Stringer grumbled as he rolled along the shaded pavement. He had a waddling gait, and his tight-buttoned black frock-coat showed an unusual development of the lumbar region. His hat raked at the strangest angles, and threatened momentarily to fall. He had the air of some preposterous water bird on land, and the hat was like a movable top-knot. "It's a country," he growled, "wherein the very Church is rotten. The scarlet woman of Babylon is a-sittin' on her seven hills in the very midst on us, and the Rector, as should be the faithful steward o' the house, has unlocked the vestry door and smuggled her into the church by the hinder way. D'ye hear what I am saying?"

"Yes, father."

The girl in pink was demure, and looked even a little depressed. She was at a time of life when it would have been easy to find themes more grateful to her fancy than the scarlet woman of Babylon afforded. A girl of about her own age went by, and exchanged a veiled glance with her. At that she sparkled into a merry and innocent smile, but instantly crushed her lips together, and, as swiftly as she could, banished the sunlight from her eyes. Mr. Stringer himself had never had any taste for innocent merriment, and did not care

to tolerate it in his children. He had been wild in his youth, and had been brought into the fold of the Church by that strange combination of terror with the influence of a character in the main honest and loyal, which acts, or used to act, upon so many Englishmen. His own youth had been unguided, except by the cares of a widowed mother, and he thought the early dissipations of that time were due wholly to the fact that no paternal hand, armed with a horsewhip, had been near him to keep him in the paths of propriety. He had a rooted sense of duty, and he was made of such material, and cast in such a mould, that duty was a something essentially unpleasant. Labor done with a light heart and for the love of it fulfilled no law of duty for Mr. Stringer. It took an inward rebellion of nature to make any act look dutiful. Since he had come to years of discretion he had given himself the full benefit of that bitter creed, and when he kept his children under and saw rigorously to it that their lives were as dull and joyless as they might be, he did no more by them than he did systematically by himself. The man was a mountain of harsh ignorance and prejudice, and was yet neither wholly unlovable nor outside the reach of admiration. He held but few ideas, but such as he had possessed him heart and soul. He would have made an excellent Cromwellian or Covenanter, and would have fought against the gallants of England who struck for King Charles, or have taken arms against the bloody Claverhouse with a genuine enthusiasm. His gospel ran: "If you would be good, be unhappy, or, at least, on no grounds venture to be happy. Keep things ugly, invent nothing, have no fancies, grind, grind, grind your heart, and strip your soul of every flower it grows."

His own soul grew none that he knew of, and so his incredible creed seemed easy to him, and therefore the less dutiful.

"I am going," he said, "to lift my hand in protest agen the goings on as has been practised this last month in Thorbury. You've got the scissors in your pocket, Mary?"

"Yes, father." The girl looked up timidly. "What am I to do with them?"

"You'll know that when the time comes," her father answered. "I've been turning this matter over i' my mind ever since the first occasion as the thing was done, and at last I've lighted on my course."

They were out of the straggling main street of the little town by this time, and amongst the fields and hedgerows, which, in the full pride and splendor of their summer beauty, gave a flat denial to at least one prime article in Isaac Stringer's creed. There are no landscape surprises in the green heart of England. The whole country lies placid and gentle like a sleeping child. Its beauties are all homely and domestic. Its streams flow idly, with scarcely a ripple on the surface, calm, uneventful, undisturbed, like the life which for the most part haunts their borders. Every here and there you may find a plunging weir with its bit of foaming backwater, just as every here and there you may find a domestic event out of the common in the lives of the slow-going people of the district. How old and how natural that comparison is between human life and flowing water!

Few people know the Church of All Angels at Thorbury, but I can find a ready-made picture of it for hundreds of thousands of pious pilgrims. That famous

church at Stratford-on-Avon, where Shakespeare's bones lie buried, is of the same epoch and built in the same style. By Thorbury Churchyard a quiet brook runs, as the Avon by St. Michael's. Rooks build in the elms which grow about the sacred building, and fill the air with ecclesiastical voices. God's Acre is half paved with flat tombstones, lichen-covered, where the inscriptions are all grown or growing fast illegible. Other tombstones lean this way and that, and between the church and the lych-gate stands one railed monument, a huge, ungainly bit of stone, on which the names of many Boyers, lords of the manor, are engraved. The church is a quarter of a mile away from the village, and the rectory lies at an easy distance from it.

The road on which Isaac Stringer led his daughter's footsteps could bring them only to the church, unless, indeed, they were bound to Heydon Hay, five miles off, to Castle Barfield, five miles further still, or to any part of the wide and unknown world which lay beyond.

"Are we going to the church, father?" asked the girl.

"You ask no question," said Isaac in his dogged growl, "and then you'll hear no lies. You wait and see. A still tongue makes a wise head, Mary."

He waddled heavily on until he reached the lych-gate, and, shouldering it ponderously aside, entered the churchyard. There were signs of labor there — scaffold poles, laid at the green border of the turf, and hewn stones, heaped in squares. He stood for a moment to stare at these with an eye of disapproval, and then, the door of the building being open, walked into the church, holding his hat by the brim, and stepping with a creaking deference. There were men at work in the interior

of the building, and standing to look on at their labors was a dark, foreign-looking gentleman of about sixty; with a handsome face, a keen eye, and a quick smile. He saluted the new-comer with a slight nod, and the quick smile shone out for the benefit of the girl, but Stringer went by without a sign of recognition, though Mary dropped a countrified courtesy as she passed.

Isaac led the way straight to the vestry, and his daughter, having entered behind him, closed the door.

"Here they be," he said, advancing to a huge dresser of black old oak which filled one side of the chamber. He turned the hasp which secured its great folding doors, and threw them open. There, hanging in due order on their respective pegs, were a score of white surplices ranging from very short to very long. Stringer took hold of the nearest to his hand, and cast it upon the table which stood in the middle of the room.

"Begin on that," he said gruffly. "Fetch out your scissors, and unrip the seams."

At this command Mary's pink cheeks went pale, and she looked at her father desolately.

"Do as I bid thee," he said, with even an unaccustomed sternness. "I tek the rights and wrongs of this on my own shoulders. As one of the churchwardens it's my dewty to see as the worship is conducted, as all things ought to be done, decently and in order. I'm going to turn these Romish garments into harmless Irish linen. Tek out your scissors and unrip the seams."

The girl obeyed with trembling, and her shaky fingers boggled over the task. Isaac watched with an uncompromising eye, and when the first surplice was dismembered, threw a second on the table. She was

just attacking this when the vestry door opened, and the foreign-looking gentleman appeared.

"You are at work for the church, Miss Stringer?" he said, with the merest trace of a French accent in his speech. "Is anything wrong with the surplices? I had thought they fitted very well."

"What is a-being done," said Isaac, "is a-being done under my orders. I'm turning all this Papistry into plain longcloth, as can be an offence to no man."

"But, my dear sir," cried the other vehemently.

"I'm neither dear nor sir to you, sir," Isaac retorted. "I'm churchwarden here, and you're the horganist. You play your horgan, and I'll see as the service o' this church is gone on with as it ought to be."

"But permit me," said the foreign gentleman; "the surplices are the Rector's private property. You have no right to lay a hand upon them without his express permission."

He was vehement for the moment, but a mere second later he was smiling and persuasive.

"Do you not think you are a little high-handed, Mr. Stringer? Would it not be better first to speak to Dr. Hay?"

"What have I got to speak to Dr. Hay about?" asked Stringer. "There's naught in common, sir, between the Rev. Dr. Denis Hay and me. I've made up my mind to what my duty is, and I shall do it, be the consequences what they may."

The organist laughed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall have to tell Dr. Hay of this," he said. "That is my duty, evidently."

"In that case," retorted Isaac, "you'd better do it. That's a thing as I shall quarrel with no man for. Do

your duty, sir, and I'll do mine. Now, Mary, mek a hend of that second piece of idolatry, and look sharp about it."

Mary looked with eyes of tearful appeal at the foreigner, who laughed again with complete good-humor.

"Let us all do our duty," he said lightly. "You, my dear young lady, I assure you, shall not be held to blame."

"I'm responsible," said Isaac weightily. "If I could ha' trusted my own fingers to do it without needlessly hinjuring the stuff, I'd ha' took the task upon myself."

"Quite so," said the organist. "I understand. I am without authority, and I must leave you to your task while I do mine."

The girl's tears fell on the white linen as she worked, and made heavy spur-edged blotches on it here and there. Isaac, with his arms folded, and with a listening attentive scowl upon his face, stood looking on.

CHAPTER II.

THE brook which washed the border of Thorbury Churchyard was barely four and twenty feet at its widest. Its waters at this time were so translucent that in its stiller reaches the parti-colored pebbles at the bottom might have been counted easily by anybody who liked to spend his time in so idle and unprofitable an employment. It went winding hither and thither in a slow zigzag course through wide meadows, and on its banks alder and willow grew in such profusion that in many places the water was completely hidden from the fields. Nobody knew this fact better, or was more grateful for it than Mr. Frank Boyer, only son of the squire of the parish and lord of the manor, Mr. Marmaduke Boyer, of Thorbury Chase. Mr. Frank had passed just a quarter of a century in this tearful vale, and so far seemed but little subdued by his experiences. He was supposed to be studying for the bar, *pro forma*, and had a sort of nodding acquaintance with Roman Law. He was a sturdy young man, of a wholesome and manly plainness of feature, embrowned by open air, as lean as a hound, as straight as an arrow, and as strong and healthy as a life of athletics and honest living could make him. In fine weather he had of late been spending a good deal of his time in paddling a canoe of his own construction about the brook, and he was familiar with its every lonely and sheltered

spot within half a dozen miles above and below the Chase. He was no lover of loneliness, and if he frequented the shaded and unpeopled watery spaces, he did it in a *solitude à deux*, being constantly on guard over the sacred and altogether charming person of Miss Ophelia Hay.

Miss Ophelia Hay was the niece and ward of the Rector of Thorbury. Her father had, in his day, been a mighty Shakespearian scholar, and had collected as vast a heap of rubbish wherewith to obscure the calm statue of the bard as any of his fellow-laborers. He had written, with the most painstaking reverence, a score of pamphlets or thereabouts to elucidate the meaning of misprinted passages which a compositor of average intelligence would have set right out of his own experience in an instant, and had brought an astonishing learning and a still more astonishing dulness of poetic apprehension into so complete a fusion that half the erudite societies of Great Britain had grown to admire and reverence his name. In this happy task he had spent all his time and most of his moderate fortune. At his death he had bequeathed his collection to the nation, whose officials betrayed no eagerness to accept it or to find it house-room. It rotted and mildewed, therefore, in damp neglect in a dozen or two of great crates and packing cases, and almost the only evidence of the scholar's love for his favorite poet survived in his daughter's name.

Ophelia was dark and *mignonne* and pretty. She was alternately arch and pensive, and Mr. Frank knew not in which mood to admire her most. She also paddled a canoe of his construction, and the two went gliding about the water of Wandshaugh Brook as inseparable

as a pair of swans. Ophelia was seven months Frank's senior, and from her superior height of age had been in the habit of looking down upon his boyish inexperience, until, in the natural course of things, she fell in love with him, and became at once impressed with the most perfect belief in his wisdom, courage, manliness, strength, beauty, and whatever else might best become a man. Long before that happy change of opinion came about, Frank had fallen in love with her, and on the very day on which Churchwarden Stringer made his unprecedented assault on the Papistical surplices, the two young people were coming to a spoken understanding. The girl looked charming, though perhaps at this time of day it may be just as well not to describe her costume. If you will turn back the pages of *Punch* as far as the year '54, you may find a fairly accurate representation of it, and if you should meet the prettiest girl of your acquaintanceship to-day attired in that antiquated style you well know you would be compelled to laughter. But the lover naturally knew nothing of the delightful costumes now in vogue, which in another five and twenty years may look to the full as absurd as exploded fashions now do, and Ophelia's dress to his mind was a part of her, and became her infinitely. An eelskin siren in a crinoline age, a crinoline siren in an eelskin age, would look equally preposterous — a reflection which would appear to lead to the appalling conclusion that there is something necessarily absurd and grotesque in the most successful of the milliner's inspirations.

Frank thought but little of millinery, and a great deal of Ophelia. The two sat in their canoe side by side, with idle paddles stretched across both of the frail

vessels, and drifted slowly, slowly, with the idle stream, sheltered from the chance of any observation by the friendly growth of the alder beds. Frank had one arm about Ophelia's waist, and her head rested upon his shoulder. I am writing in summer weather, and it is delightful to think how many young people are engaged in like or similar fashion at this very hour. Blue heaven above, and blue heaven beneath, with only themselves and their fair reflections hung midway, they floated as if in air, as happy as the world could make them, as happy as the whole wide world could make them only once. They murmured one another's names at times, but could find no other word to say.

The friendly alders broke at last, and for fear of observing eyes they drifted apart, and paddled slowly down stream, the girl in front looking forward with dreaming eyes, and the young man in the rear admiring every line and motion of her supple form. At the boat-house, which stood at the foot of the rectory lawn, Frank sprang to land, fixed his own craft, and with unnecessary cares, which were none the less welcome for being needless, helped his sweetheart to follow.

"I shall tell the Rector at once," he said, holding Ophelia's hand in both his own, and looking down at her.

She could not have admired him more if he had been going to face armies, although, in truth, her guardian was one of the mildest of created men. There was a farewell kiss, and Ophelia ran away to shut herself up in her own room, and await events in a happy, tremulous expectancy, and Frank marched up to the rectory intent upon his purpose.

The Reverend Dr. Denis Hay sat in his study on the

ground floor, with the French windows open to admit the fragrant summer air. A book lay on the table before him, and he, with his spectacles pushed up upon his forehead, sat staring absent-mindedly across it. He had the gray and inward-looking eye of the born dreamer, and a face of a singular delicacy and purity of color. His close-cut, snow-white hair, too stubborn for a parting, rayed about his head like a shorn halo. The expression of his face was full of a mild, allowing humor, and even at his dreamiest his mouth smiled.

Frank's entrance awoke him from his fancies, whatever they might be, and he turned his face to his guest with a look of accustomed welcome.

"Well, Frank, my boy," he said genially; "studying hard, as usual?"

"Not quite so hard as usual," said Frank, who wore a look of sternest resolve, and might by his aspect have been about to encounter a regiment single-handed. "I have something of the utmost importance to speak about. May I close the windows?"

He waited for no leave in answer to this question, and when he had turned his back the Doctor, after a fashion he had, laughed without a sound, but made haste to resume a face of gravity before the young man turned.

"I shall be happy to advise or help you in any way," he said. "Sit down, my boy. What is it?"

Frank disregarded his invitation, but leaning both brown hands upon the table opposite the Rector, looked down upon him, and blurted out his message in a phrase.

"I have asked Ophelia to marry me."

"Oh!" said the Rector, "you should have more

respect for your neighbor's nerves. A little diplomacy, a little round-aboutness, might have saved me something of a shock."

At this instant there came a tap at the door, and the Rector, with a humorous eye on Frank, cried, "Come in." A neat housemaid, in the crispest of cotton prints and the snowiest of caps, appeared in the doorway.

"Mr. Saint Sauveur wants to see you, sir, on very urgent business."

At this the Rector's eye twinkled newly, and he looked at Frank again.

"Shall we defer our talk a moment?" he asked. "Perhaps we had better finish it at once. Ask Mr. Saint Sauveur to wait," he concluded, turning to the housemaid. "I shall be at liberty in a very little while."

The girl retired, closing the door behind her, and the Rector, taking off his glasses, polished them with an irritating air of commonplace.

"So," he began after a while, "you have asked Ophelia to marry you. May I ask when?"

"This morning," Frank answered, still unduly resolved and stern.

"That would be too precipitate," the elder answered, "and, indeed, I think we are beyond the legal hour already."

He made a show of consulting his watch, and shook his head as he returned it to his pocket.

"I don't want to get married quite so hurriedly as that, sir," said Frank.

"A most unlover-like declaration," said the Rector.

"I spoke to her this morning," the young man continued.

"And what said Ophelia?"

"She said 'Yes,' sir," Frank answered, blushing fierily.

"She said 'Yes,'" echoed the Rector. "And in that case, my young friend, what becomes of my authority as her legal guardian? You have not consulted my dignity in this matter, Frank. You sink me to the level of an interested spectator. And now I will give you a piece of news as novel as your own. When Alexander the Great first encountered Diogenes — but perhaps you know the story?"

"I rather think I have met an allusion to it somewhere," Frank answered, growing a little more at ease.

"Nothing is more agreeable," said the Rector, "than this interchange of novel thought and intelligence. Is your father as deep in your confidence as I am, Frank?"

"Not altogether," the young man replied, "he will be in half an hour's time. He guesses all about it, though, and was chaffing me about it last night at dinner."

"Very well," said the Rector, rising and laying his hand on his companion's shoulder, "if Ophelia says 'yes,' and your father says 'yes,' there is nothing left for it but for me to say 'yes' also, and to wish you God-speed and happiness, and that I do, my lad, with my heart. I have an official and a constituted right to be a bore on this occasion, a double right, as a clergyman and as a guardian. I let you off for the present, however, for Saint Sauveur is kicking his heels outside, and will be impatient by this time. Wait a moment, until I am through with his business, and then you and I may walk up to the Chase together, and see your father.

My presence may help to soften the asperities of his humor."

With that he moved gauntly to the door—he was unusually tall, and his slender shoulders had an awkward stoop—and throwing it open, cried into the hall: "Saint Sauveur! This way. I am ready for you."

The organist entered, smiling, nodded to his Rector in a friendly and familiar fashion, and shook hands with Frank.

"What is it?" asked the Rector.

"Flat treason!" returned the organist; "sedition! sacrilege!"

"So bad as that?" asked the old clergyman. "Sit down. Expound."

"I have been watching the reparations at the church," the organist began as he seated himself, "and as I stood there entered Mr. Stringer, accompanied by his daughter. They walked straight into the vestry, and I, not dreaming of their fell purpose, made no attempt to bar their path. When, prompted by I know not what spirit of inquiry, I looked in at the vestry door, what think you these eyes beheld? I will give you a year to guess in, and you shall not guess."

"Your offer seems reasonable," said the Rector, "but I decline it. You may save time and tell me."

"The girl," pursued Saint Sauveur, "was crying and trembling. She held a pair of scissors in her hand, and she was in the act of ripping up, under her father's orders, one of the choir surplices. When I inquired the meaning of this, the father informed me that he was converting a Romish symbol into harmless longcloth, which could hurt nobody."

"Upon my word," cried Frank, "that's a pretty piece of insolence!"

“Dear me,” said the Rector, “this must be seen to! this must be seen to! Stringer is a very dogged fellow. I am afraid we shall have trouble with him.”

A moment later he smiled, as if he saw a humorous side to the situation.

“It’s an inventive compromise,” he said. “From his point of view it is ingenious. The frugal iconoclast!”

He led the way into the hall, the others following, and taking up his hat there, went mildly out of the house. Three minutes’ easy walking brought him and his companions to the church, and there in the vestry stood Stringer, with his arms folded, and his big back against the black oak dresser. Little Mary, with the scissors in her hand, looked up with a pale and frightened face, still wet with tears, as the Rector entered.

“Goo on, my child,” said Isaac stolidly, “and do the dewty as your father imposed upon you.”

“My dear Stringer,” said the mild Rector, advancing and taking up the half-dismembered garment then in hand. “Really, Stringer, really!”

This was rather severe for Dr. Hay, who conveyed a world of reproach and remonstrance in an aggrieved motion of the head as he spoke.

“It’s no use for thee to shake thy head at me, parson,” said Isaac, who looked, indeed, as if much stronger measures than that were needed to dissuade him from his purpose. “I’ve abode over this for many weeks, and I know full well what the major part of the church folks think about it. I shall have the most of ’em o’ my side, and if I stood alone among a million it’d mek no difference. I should lift up my testimony agen this Romish papistry all the same.”

“My dear Stringer,” said the Rector, “the things are

absolutely harmless. There is nothing in the slightest degree Romish or Papistical about them. They have been worn in the choirs of the cathedrals of the English Church without exception almost from time immemorial."

"I've lived in Thorbury," said Mr. Stringer, "man and b'y, for nigh on sixty 'ear. It's twenty sence I was first app'inted churchwarden, and until such time as you come here, Dr. Hay, these Papish practices was never known here."

"Now, you must know," protested the Rector, as mild as ever, "that in injuring the property of another you are committing an act which is, on the face of it, illegal. We are all bound to respect the law, and none of us has a right to take it into his own hands. It is your duty as a member of the church to accept the ruling of its authorities, and if you see anything you disapprove of, you may appeal to the bishop, by whose decision I shall certainly abide."

For sole answer, Isaac turned, opened the doors against which he leaned, took down a new surplice, and thrust it into his daughter's unwilling arms.

"Goo on with that, Polly," he said, "while me and the parson has our talk out."

"You'd better let me have that, Miss Stringer," said Frank, interposing, and the girl, with a sense of momentary relief, permitted him to take it.

"I dunno," Isaac growled, looking from one to another, "as I've got any great right to be dissatisfied. I've lifted up my voice and spoke agen the prevailin' iniquity, and so far I've done my duty."

"You've done a little stupid, unmeaning mischief, if that's what you mean," Frank answered hotly, "and if

I were in the Rector's place I should be inclined to take a very different tone with you."

"You would, would you?" said Isaac; "and what might you ha' done, if you'd been Rector?"

"My dear boy," said Dr. Hay, laying a hand on Frank's arm, "don't let us embitter controversy. I have no doubt, no doubt at all, that Mr. Stringer believes his objection to a surpliced choir to be a matter of conscience with him. I shall hope to have a talk with him, and to prove that it is nothing of the kind. He has acted under a misapprehension."

"You may talk, parson," said Mr. Stringer, with a doggedness of voice and demeanor unusual even for him; "you may talk till you talk your head off, and you'll mek no difference to me."

"But suppose, my dear Stringer," said the Rector, his lips twitching and his eye twinkling in spite of him, "suppose I should be able to prove to you that you have been mistaken."

"That's what you'll niver do," answered Isaac, with the emphasis of conviction. "Not you, nor no man living."

The organist spoke in German, citing a famous passage in the works of Schiller. "My name is Stupidity. Shoot all the fiery arrows of your wit at me, and see if my dark belly cannot quench and hold them."

"That is true enough," the Rector answered smilingly in the same tongue. The churchwarden looked suspiciously from one to the other.

"Hast got a Papish organist, parson," he said in stolid wrath and scorn; "a Papish organist as carries a Papish tongue in his head."

"The tongue of the Reformation, my good friend," said Dr. Hay; "the mother tongue of Martin Luther."

In respect of these matters Mr. Stringer was a Gallio. He cared for none of them.

"Wearing these here Romish bedgowns," he declaimed sullenly, pointing to the linen burden the Rector had laid across his arm; "speaking in Romish tongues in the very vestry of the church, how do you expect a blessin' to rest upon the building?"

"Haven't you had almost enough of this ignorant folly, sir?" Frank answered, almost impatiently.

"My dear boy," said the Rector, "you hurt me far more than you help me. I beg you to be quiet."

"Very well, sir," said Frank, but he glared at Isaac with so pronounced an expression of contemptuous anger that the surly old protestor would at once have made for him but for his sense of the reverence due to the sacredness of his surroundings.

"I'm not here to deal with you," he said, choking his wrath deliberately; "you're a himpudent young cockerel, Squire's son as you be, and allus was, sence you was that high, and horsewhipped my son Joe. I'm no bit for brawling in a church. I've done my dewty, and I've said my say, and now, if you please, gentlemen, I'll tek my leave."

With that he withdrew, not without a certain sort of dignity. To his own mind he came off victor, and, on the whole, was very much inclined to be satisfied with himself. The Rector stood thoughtfully stroking his clean-shaven cheeks with his finger-tips until the pink-clad figure of little Mary had disappeared. Then he looked at the organist, who was smiling broadly.

"Yes," he said, in answer to the smile, "it has its droll side, I allow that. But it is a little embarrassing too, and I hardly know how to meet it. I shall never

shake that fellow's opinion, you know. He is one of those people whose ideas grow underground. They are all root, and it is quite in vain to tug at them. You know, Frank, that the church was in a desolate condition when I came. The first time I preached here there was a broom leaning against the altar railings. It got into my head, that broom, and spoiled my sermon. And then the choir—I can't afford to buy Sunday coats for all of them, and half a dozen of the best are positively out at elbows. Stringer laid his plans well, too," he went on, chuckling at his own embarrassment. "He chose Saturday for his work of destruction, and here are, at least, half a dozen surplices made away with. We shall have a mutilated choir to-morrow."

"Denis," said the organist, taking him by the hand, "you have the sweetest temper, the most truly philosophic mind."

"My dear Ernest," said the Rector, "what is the good of being angry? And, besides that, my dear fellow, I can't help seeing the fun of it, and the man from his own standpoint is, no doubt, quite right. How do I know how foolish some of my standpoints may seem to people who know better? Frank, my boy, we'll go to the Chase together, and have a talk with your father."

CHAPTER III.

FRANK'S love affair was not to be immediately disposed of, for just as the Rector laid his hand upon the vestry door, there arose a loud hubbub in the sacred building, and the workmen engaged there shouted to one another with excited voices. The Rector, Frank, and Saint Sauveur hurried into the church, to learn what might be the cause of so unwonted a disturbance, and there, in one of the side aisles, stood an Irish laborer, with both hands outstretched cup-wise together, and in the bowl thus formed lay fully a hundred gold pieces of varying sizes. They were mingled with dust and cobweb and gritty fragments of time-blackened mortar.

"What's that?" cried Frank, who was the first to break through the group which surrounded the finder of the treasure-trove.

"'Tis a fistful o' gold, sorr," said the laborer, "and there's more where it kem from."

The onlookers made way for the Rector, who, in his turn, began to question.

"Where did you find this?"

"Here," said the laborer, making a lunge with his foot, "beneath the ould gintleman that's lyin' there in the stone bedgown. Oi wint to scrape out the dirt wid me hands, and this is what I kem upon. There's the bits of an ould wooden box that's gone all to pieces."

The effigy of Sir Miles Gedford lay full length, in

ruff and gown, with peaked stone beard, over that long departed worthy's tomb. A great slab of crumpled stone, bearing the half-effaced inscription, had been taken out from the side of the plinth, revealing its dim and dusty inwards. The Rector called for a light, and one of the laborers, after intricate search, produced a solitary lucifer match from his waistcoat-pocket, and struck it upon his trousers. Then, falling upon his knees, he lit up for a moment with the flame of the burning match the shadowed interior of the plinth, and there, scattered about the floor, were more gold coins of varying sizes, and the fragments of a carved box which had evidently long ago fallen to pieces by the action of dry-rot.

"Sweep everything carefully out," said the Rector, "and let us see exactly what we have here."

So said, so done. The treasure-trove was carried into the vestry, and laid upon the table there, and the coins being counted and examined proved to be all of gold, and one hundred and seventy-three in number. Amongst them were one of the leopard coins of Edward the Black Prince, a noble and a half-noble of the third Edward, and three gold pennies of the third Henry. But the great majority of the coins were of the reigns of Henry the Seventh and Henry the Eighth, and it seemed pretty evident that the hoard had been hidden in the days when

"Bluff Harry broke into the spence,
And turned the cowls adrift."

In all, estimating the find by size and weight, the three examiners came to the conclusion that the intrinsic value of the gold was not less than three hundred and fifty pounds sterling. No one of them was learned with re-

spect to old coins, and they could not tell what might be the real worth of the collection. Naturally, after the fashion of the ignorant in such matters, they over-estimated it prodigiously.

“And now,” cried Dr. Hay, laying his hands, palms downwards, on the pile of gold upon the vestry table; “now I see my way to the complete restoration of the church. I will write to Sir Walter to-night, and get him to come down as soon as his engagements will allow. We have talked of the plan already, and he will go to work with enthusiasm.”

He beamed as he spoke, glancing from one of his companions to the other, and groping at the coins, lifted the greater number of them in a double handful, allowing them to trickle back again upon the table in a tinkling stream.

“But what of the Crown rights, Denis?” asked Saint Sauveur. “Does not all discovered treasure in England belong to the Crown?”

“The Crown rights!” cried the Rector, flushing ever so little, and almost trembling in his earnestness. “What of the ecclesiastical rights? What is the obvious presumption here? Who but an officer of the church could find time and opportunity to secrete this treasure? No, sir. The money belonged to the church. It comes back to the church, and on the church it shall be expended.”

The old gentleman was beautifully excited. Ever since he had entered upon his duties at Thorbury it had been his dream to renovate the building, and to strip it of the ugly and clumsy additions which ignorant hands had set about it. He had held the rectorship of Thorbury barely a year, but his old vicarage of Wandshaugh

was but three miles away, and he had known the church these forty years, and had mourned over its condition as ardent ecclesiastics will in the like cases.

He and Saint Sauveur sat down, pencil in hand, to classify and catalogue the coins. Frank's interest in the *trouvaille* began to fade. It was a very interesting circumstance, no doubt, and for five or ten minutes had been exciting enough to put his own immediate personal affairs into the background. But now they began to reassert themselves, and speedily took up their natural place again.

"This task will take you some time, Dr. Hay," he said, when he had waited awhile in growing impatience.

"Yes, my dear boy," said the Vicar, looking up with absent-minded eyes; "some time, no doubt."

"In that case," said Frank, "I will go home alone."

"By all means," returned the Rector, scrutinizing a coin to find the date upon it, and quite evidently attaching no meaning either to Frank's words or his own. "Do so by all means. Yes, yes. By all means."

Frank left the two elderly gentlemen to their task, and walked gayly towards the Chase, his mind full of the unapproachable perfections of Ophelia, as in the circumstances it was bound to be. He thought of the line, "The course of true love never did run smooth," and laughed at it in merry triumph. His affairs were likely to run smooth enough. There was plenty of money on his side, there were youth, grace, health, wit and beauty on the other. Ophelia's guardian had already approved the match, and he was as sure as he could be of anything in the world that his father would give it at least as warm a welcome. And, indeed, if it had not been for that affair of the surplices there is nothing more likely

than that Marmaduke Boyer would have shaken his son by the hand on hearing his intelligence and have bestowed upon him the paternal blessing. Even when Mr. Stringer was dismissed, Frank would not have come too late had it not been for that other affair of the treasure-trove. But as things happened he reached home just as his father was setting about a piece of justice work with some yokel of the neighborhood, and had perforce to wait until that was over. Nothing short of the firing of the house would have seemed to justify to Mr. Boyer the interruption of his solemn function as a Justice of the Peace.

So Frank waited, and in the interval a serious *contretemps* prepared itself.

Dr. Hay and Saint Sauveur having completed their catalogue, the Rector took away the discovered gold in a loose bag of a chamois leather purse he carried, and betaking himself to his own residence tied the treasure up and sealed it with befitting gravity, and then stowed it away under lock and key. Having done this he bethought himself again of Frank's great news of the morning, and set out in pursuit of him to the Chase. He had not gone far upon the dusty country road, when a wrangle of voices at a little distance prepared him for a new excitement. Life in Thorbury went so slowly as a general thing that any one of the three events of the morning would have found matter for a month's digestion in ordinary circumstances. To-day it seemed to rain adventure. The rector quickened his footsteps, and rounding a corner of the lane came upon four of his parishioners and one man in corduroy and velveteen who was a stranger to him. First amongst his parishioners was the village constable, in a tall glazed hat and

a blue tight-buttoned coat with tails like those of the modern evening dress-coat. Next came the village sexton and bell-ringer, a red-faced man of pursy habit of body, who was objurgating the constable in terms quite unmeet for his Rector's hearing. The third Thorbury man was Squire Boyer's gamekeeper, and the fourth was Jonah Wood, on the collar of whose smock frock the village constable held a stern and masterful hand. Now Jonah was the son of Habakkuk, and Habakkuk was the village sexton. The father had but just met the son, ignominiously escorted by the two gamekeepers and the constable, and though he was a law-abiding man as a rule had been tempted to essay a rescue.

The whole five were shouting together when the Rector heaved in sight, but on his appearance the verbal storm was lulled with miraculous suddenness.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"The matter is, sir," says Habakkuk, "as this here thick-witted Collins —" indicating the constable.

"Thick-witted yourself," said the constable, in stately repartee.

"I'm as innocent," whined Jonah, "as the noo-born babe."

"One at a time, please," cried the Rector. "Let me hear your story, Collins."

Collins, leaning upon his prisoner's collar in the attitude sometimes adopted by orators who wish to look familiarly at ease before their audiences, set one foot a little before the other, touched the brim of his glazed hat, and unfolded his story.

"This here person, sir," said he, introducing the velvet-clad stranger, "is a gamekeeper of my lord's and lives at Hargate. He depose, sir, that he see the

prisoner last night in my lord's woods, but bein' as there is a path through 'em as the country people is allowed to use, he do nothink but keep a heye upon him. He see him foolin' round as if he was looking for something very special, but no actual reason for laying 'ands upon him, though he have been suspected for a many years past. Then, this morning, between the hours of two and three, this gentleman catch sight of him down to Wandshaugh Spinney, just where the Squire's woods and my lord's do meet, sir." The gentleman this time indicated was the Squire's gamekeeper. The Rector looked at him when he was alluded to, and the man nodded in assent and went on nodding at intervals until the constable's story was concluded. "The prisoner, sir," the officer proceeded, "was a-lying flat upon his back, a-making use of some kind of a curious call he have. What there is to it, sir, I cannot say, but it draw the young birds to him whether they will or no. He got three birds in that there basket" — the Squire's gamekeeper held up the basket in evidence — "and there they are now, sir, if you'll be so good as look. The keeper makes a go for him, sir. The prisoner, as I understand it, rises and runs awhile, and then drops down upon his fickle hands and knees, so that the keeper he fly over him. Then the prisoner make a run for it, sir, and the gentleman as see him first in my lord's wood happen to catch sight of him, and foller him for the best part of six mile, but not knowing that part of the country-side so hintimate, he loses him. They find him again in Thorbury at the Fox and Dogs this noontide, and they give him in charge, sir. We're going before the Squire this minute."

"Saving your presence, sir," cried the sexton, "all

this is a pack o' lies. I see the lad to bed myself, last night. I blowed out his candle, as I always have done this two-and-twenty 'ear. I was down first in the mornin', the door was locked all right and proper, and when I went upstairs, sir, Jonah was sleepin' in his bed, sir, as innocent as a babe."

"I should think that," said the Rector, lifting his mild brows and looking from one to the other of Jonah's accusers, "I should think that quite conclusive. The mere sight of a man in the dark — there was no moon last night — could hardly be allowed to go against evidence like that. Really, I think I should allow the matter to go no farther. You may ruin this young man's prospects for life, you know. It would be a very serious thing, a very dreadful thing, for him, and if you are mistaken, as seems very probable, it would be even a more dreadful thing for yourselves, if, on your opinion, this unfortunate young man were wrongly convicted."

What might have been the weight of this argument without a certain illustrative and accompanying gesture would be hard to say, but when the Rector's too-ready hand went groping in his pocket, the beginnings of the gamekeeper's murmurs were hushed, and the sternness of the constable's hold on Jonah's collar was relaxed a little. The Squire was the Squire, duty was duty, and poaching was one of the deadliest of offences. Each one of these propositions was as undeniable as the other, but the Rector was also a power in the land, was hand in glove with Mr. Marmaduke, and might, for purposes of profit, be quite conscientiously accepted as his *locum tenens* in this matter. Besides that, gamekeepers and constables were alike certain that Jonah would fall into their hands again one of these days, and

to have sent him to prison would have robbed them for a considerable time of their choicest diet of excitement. A little regret had already mingled with their triumph as they had seized him.

"I have not much loose silver," said the Rector. "Divide that amongst you; and I trust, Wood, that you will allow this to be a lesson to you."

This was hardly logical, but nobody was disposed to criticise. Jonah went his way — a saved yokel — and his late captors accompanied him in amity, and even went so far as to pay for beer for him at the first public-house arrived at. Dr. Denis Hay, little guessing what sort of explosive mine he had been laying, went on to the Chase, and in the innocence of his heart told the story of Jonah to the Squire.

If there was ever a more peppery man in the world than Marmaduke Boyer, he must have been both dangerous and a nuisance. People used to say of Boyer that a better fellow never broke bread, but —, which expressed a great deal.

He was tall and handsome, but as red as a ferret, and the very baldness of his high forehead had something angry in its aspect.

"What?" roared the Squire, "you've paid the constable to free that fellow! Why, what the —"

"Really, Boyer, really," said the mild Rector.

"You're a meddling, stupid ass," cried Boyer, with more and much more, to the same effect. "I've been hungering for that scoundrel's blood this five years. And now we get hold of him, and by gad, sir" —

"But really, Boyer, really!" said the Rector.

Somehow, in the course of the interview, there was no mention of Frank and Ophelia, and the adage the

poor young gentleman had smiled at that morning looked as if it might be susceptible of fulfilment even in his case. But the misunderstanding between the Squire and the Rector had graver results than even the roughening of the way of courtship, as shall presently appear.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Squire of Thorbury was an excellent fellow in his way, but of a temperament curiously brittle. He had one of the kindest hearts in the world, and would at almost any time have gone five miles out of his way to do a kindness, and twenty to avoid doing an injury. But this sweetness of nature in him was often quite flatly contradicted. He would take a prejudice in a second, and the fancy would grow incorporate with his blood, so that it took years to wear it out of him. In person he was big and handsome, and his florid face and blue eyes beamed with good nature when they did not happen to be glooming with a sense of affront or blazing with anger. His hair, whiskers, and eyebrows were of a foxy reddish brown, and the backs of his hands were covered with a fell of the same tinge. People who knew him were careful of treading on his corns, and the general impression of quiet folks was that he was a dangerous sort of man to know.

Mr. Boyer took a particular pride in the fact that he was English, and had a wholesome and befitting contempt for all things and people of foreign growth. Being English, he respected the Church, and his feeling for the cloth had hitherto kept him—choleric as he was—from assailing the Rector. But the waters of bitterness being once let loose, flowed freely, and rapidly submerged many old landmarks. The history of the damaged surplices naturally went through the parishes

of Thorbury with something of an electric swiftness, and with equal naturalness, excited something of an electric disturbance. Cloud met cloud — it would be difficult to find a better simile — with prodigious noises. Stringer had his hosts where Dr. Hay had but a handful, but the devoted few made as much noise as the indignant many, and the world in those parts seemed shaken to its foundations. The Squire took sides after the headstrong and passionate fashion which came natural to him, and the general hurly-burly was audible in neighboring villages. The mild Rector looked on in considerable amazement, and sometimes found his sense of humor inadequate to the occasion.

The thing that really embittered the Squire was this: a brother magistrate had committed Jonah for trial, and a jury of Jonah's countrymen had acquitted him. It was never to be supposed that Dr. Hay's action in that matter could be accepted as final, and Boyer's first move, when his rage was over, was to order the re-arrest of the delinquent. Of course he was instantly obeyed, but the two gamekeepers had broken bread and eaten salt, so to speak, with the Rector, and they gave their evidence reluctantly. The languid young counsel to whom the judge had entrusted poor Jonah's destinies brightened at the signs, and bullied and badgered them to such excellent effect that their evidence became a tissue of uncertainty and evasion. The accused was acquitted, and Boyer was as certain of the man's guilt as he was of his own existence. He was fit to eat the Rector on the day of the trial, and, in the course of an interview with him, in the which Dr. Hay in vain essayed the soft answer which only turns away wrath with the reasonable, he cast off and repudi-

ated him and his forever, and swore a feud as bitter as that which McPhairson recorded against the Clan MacTavish.

In these mournful days Frank and Ophelia held stolen, secret meetings, and vowed undying fidelity to each other, and promised faith and patience, and felt that they were acting in a drama of the most harrowing interest, as, indeed, to themselves they were. And, though they never found it out till years afterwards, the pretty little fair-weather love they had started with took root in the storm, and struck deep, and made a happy man and woman in the end, as shall in due course appear.

The battle between Church and State — for to Thorbury it meant no less than that — was full of the most delightful matter (for an onlooker), and brought out human nature in all its phases — the humorous, the stupid, the crass, the pathetic, the indignant, and one knows not what.

“I’ll fight this here matter out,” said Stringer, “and I’ll fight it to the bitter hend. Nobody iver altered *my* opinion, and nobody iver wool.”

In that excellent state of mind he lived until his time came, as proud of his impenetrable pig-headedness as a young mother of her baby, and publishing it everywhere noisily, as if it had been a gift of genius and a virtue.

Jonah naturally took the Rector’s side, but with an economic reservation.

“What I look at,” he said, “is the rewination on it. It’ll tek a little forchin to find soap an’ starch for all them theer white bedgowns.”

Inwardly, perhaps, he bemoaned himself, asking why

these things were not sold, and the money given to the poor. But he knew to whom he owed his liberty, and gratitude kept him silent. Apart from that he was not merely a martyr to suspicion, but the son of the sexton and bell-ringer, and in that double capacity was occasionally permitted to visit the Rector's kitchen, to revel on broken meats there, and to taste the table beer. Discretion not less than gratitude sealed his lips.

Mr. Stringer was at table a day or two after Jonah's acquittal, and the weekly paper was propped up before him on the cruet-stand. He knew the news already, but it fed his mood to read it, and he was certain that not only in ecclesiastical but in social matters the Rector was hurrying the parish to the very mischief. He felt sapient and wise beyond his common use, for had not he himself, on the very morning of the poacher's arrest, prophesied that fate for him, and divined the methods by which he had contrived to pass the night?

Mr. Stringer sat at the head of the table, and on one side sat Mary his daughter, and on the other Joseph his son. Joseph was a good-looking hobbledehoy of about three-and-twenty, with an expression of settled injury and discontent. The father sat staring at his newspaper, and solidly masticating a morsel of steak, holding another at his lips upon the tip of his fork in readiness for use. Whenever the young man caught his sister's eye he wagged his head up and down with a derisive motion, and drew his nose and lips into an expression of weary cynicism as profound as he could command. By and by he began to beat a tattoo upon his plate with a table-knife. Isaac opened his mouth for the reserved morsel, but before closing on it addressed his son.

"Put that knife down, sir. And don't make them hirritating nyses."

"All right," said Joseph, with fatigued disdain, laying the knife upon the table. Isaac looked at him severely, lowered his fork, raised it again, took off the morsel of steak, and chewed with the sternest reprobation. "Oh, I'm sick!" said Joseph, sulkily returning his father's stare. "Do you think I'm going to be a kid for ever? Why can't a man go about his business when he's eat his victuals? What do I want to stop here for?"

"You want to stop here," said his father, chewing and scowling doggedly, "because you're told to stop here. You sit where you are till the 'ed of the table gives you leave to rise."

"All right!" returned Joseph as before.

"Children," said Isaac, striking the table with his knife-hands to emphasize the quotation, "obey your parents."

"Parents," retorted Joseph, in a murmur only half audible, "provoke not your children to wrath."

Mr. Stringer saw fit to ignore this, and went back to his steak and his newspaper. The little girl sat and trembled. Such scenes as this had been growing frequent of late, and she lived in constant dread of an explosion. A disturbed and ominous-seeming quiet fell upon the trio. The father ate with a prolonged and purposed slowness, and Joseph's feet began to play tattoo upon the boarded floor.

"Will you hush them unmeaning rows?" the head of the house demanded.

"No!" said Joseph, bracing himself suddenly, and looking with a white face straight before him at the

whitewashed wall which faced the window. Mary clasped her hands beneath the table and sat in a breathless horror. The dreaded explosion had come at last. For a moment Stringer himself was paralyzed.

"Oh!" he said, and so sat with his mouth open. "You won't, won't you?"

"No, I won't," retorted Joseph, breathing stertorously, and looking out of window still. "I'm sick of being treated like a kid. I'm sick of sitting at table hours and hours after I've done with my own victuals."

"Oh!" cried Mary, "never more than twenty minutes, Joe, dear." She was afraid of the sound of her own voice a second later and wondered at her own temerity in raising it.

"Twenty minutes or twenty years," said Joseph, "it's all one to me. I'm sick of it."

"Wait awhile," papa broke in ponderously. "I'll deal with thee in a minute or two."

"I'll deal with myself if this kind of thing goes on," said Joseph, with an air of desperation. "I'll chuck myself into Wandshaugh Brook, and write a letter to the papers telling 'em what I did it for."

"Joe!" cried Mary, finding voice again; and, rising from her place, she ran round the table, and there clipped the author of this dreadful threat by the neck, as if to prevent the instant fulfilment of his purpose. Joseph sat irresponsive as a gate-post, and swallowed to express his sense of injury. Papa, having recovered from his momentary shock, fed himself in a massive calm, keeping an eye upon his son. He had come, somewhere in the course of his limited reading, on a dissertation concerning the mysterious power of the human eye to quell rebellion, but Joseph annulled the charm by looking sedulously out of window.

"I'll Wandshaugh Brook you!" said Mr. Stringer, reaching for the beer jug. "I'll write your letters for the papers! Thee wait till I've done dinner!"

"You can save yourself all manner o' trouble about me," replied Joseph. "I'm not going to stop here to be treated like a kid any longer. D'ye think it's likely at my time o' life? Did y'ever put up with it yourself? D'ye think as you'd have stood it for a week? Not you! Then why should I? Let go my neck, Polly! I'll put an end to it. I'll go and list for a soldier. I'll go and fall agen a Savage Foe! Don't talk to me. My mind's made up."

"Yis," said papa, almost genially. "I'll Savage Foe thee! It's a good five year, I should think, since I gi'en thee a dressin'. Wait till I've done dinner and I'll tickle y'up, my lad."

"No," returned Joseph, shaking his head with a mournful decision. "Not with my good will. I'm as good a man o' my hands, though I say it, as is to be found for five mile round."

At this the father laid down his knife and fork and arose deliberately from the table. Joseph arose also, and the two faced each other, with Mary clasping her hands and weeping between them.

"Oh, father, don't. Oh, Joe dear, don't."

"Hush your prattle," said Stringer sternly, addressing her. "As for you, Joseph, you can mek your mind up straight away. You have treated me contumelious under my own roof, and you can tek the consequences which way you like. You can fend for yourself, my lad, and begin it to-day, or you can have the dressin' I promised you. I'll have no brawlin' with them as I'm placed in authority over. The ch'ice is yourn, Joseph."

"All right," said Joseph. "It's easy made. I shall let no man living lay a hand o' me so long as I can help it."

"Very well," replied his father. "There's the door."

"I'll find my way through it in a minute," Joseph answered, "but before I go I'll take leave to speak a word. You've used me bitter cruel ever since I can remember. I'm called 'Tiger' in the village to this very day because of the stripes I used to carry when I was a lad and went to bathe in Wandshaugh Brook. I've never had a likin' for you as I should ha' liked to have. I've took a longish time to make my mind up, and now I'm sorry as I haven't spoken long ago. I think that's about all."

"Good," said his father bitterly. "Good, and good again. It's no use to waste more time in talkin'. You can pack your traps and make a march of it as soon as you like, my lad."

"No traps for me," responded the exile. "You shall have my clothes as soon as I'm in uniform."

With that he marched through the doorway, and his sister, pursuing him into the narrow hall, laid hold upon him with renewed tears and beseechings.

"It's no use, Polly," said Joseph, standing doggedly to be embraced, and looking straight over her head. "I'm past the time o' life for the sort o' treatment I get here. Theer, let me go. I'll write to you from time to time, but as for him and me—we're parted, and so much the better."

Isaac, slicing wrathfully at the remnant of his steak, heard this, and moved his head from side to side with a world of obstinacy in his looks. He heard the slam of the door as his son left the house, and a moment

later he heard the door reopen and Mary's voice calling into the open street. He arose anew at that, and marching to the front door, called the girl back. He was very well settled in his own opinions, and cared little for the judgments of other people on his actions, but it shook him a little to see Dr. Hay and his organist were the only onlookers at the scene of farewell which was being enacted in the roadway.

"Do you hear, Mary?" he cried; "come here this instant minute, or else tek your pick between that reprobate and me."

"Dear me!" said the Rector. "More quarrels! more troubles!"

The girl ran into the house crying, her father closed the door noisily behind her, and the exiled Joseph, not knowing what better to do, touched his hat to the parson, and tried to look as if there were nothing the matter.

"I — I am afraid," said the Rector. "I hope you have not seriously quarrelled with your father, Stringer."

"Why that's past praying for, Dr. Hay," responded Joseph. "We've had a bit of a shindy. I've been expecting it for years past, and now it's here. There's nobody less surprised than I am." He had taken up, in his passage through the hall, a switch it was his habit to carry, and, after staring sheepishly about him for a moment, he fell to slapping his leg with it, and did his best to seem unconcerned and at his ease. "I'll say good afternoon, Dr. Hay," he added, looking up and turning on his heel.

"Not so quick, my young friend; not so quick," cried the Rector, laying a hand on the young man's arm and detaining him.

"I've no doubt you mean kindly by your meddling, sir," said Joseph respectfully; "but there's nothing to be done. My father's not a man that can abide to have another man in the same parish with him, let alone in the same house. I believe if he'd had his way he'd ha' kept me in petticoats till I was twenty. I mean him no kind of ill, and I dare say he means me none, but we're best apart; and we're parted, and it'd be a real shame and pity to try to bring us together again. I'll say good afternoon, sir. I've got a fifteen-mile walk afore me, and I should like to get it over pretty early."

"Upon my word," said Dr. Hay mournfully, "we seem to live in the middle of dissensions. You must let me talk to your father, Stringer, and you must let me have a talk with you. Let me see you to-morrow, now. Promise to come to the Rectory to-morrow. Make your own time, but come to see me. You mustn't quarrel with your father, Stringer. He is getting on in years, and in a little while he will be wanting you. It's a sad thing to be left lonely in old age."

"No offence, sir," returned Joseph, "but you're the last man that's likely to have weight with father. You might just as well keep your breath to cool your porridge. No offense, sir. It's our country way of speaking, as you know, sir."

"I'm afraid my influence is likely to be of little service," said the Doctor, turning with his gaunt stoop towards the organist. "Boyer could have done something, but then Boyer is at loggerheads with me. Frank could have done something, but then Frank is at loggerheads with Stringer. It's really very mournful. Really, it is extremely mournful."

"What can't be cured must be endured, sir," said

Joseph. "I'll say good afternoon now, sir, if you'll be so good as to allow me. I shall be pleased if you'll give my respects to Mr. Frank. I mayn't see him again for a little while, for I'm going into another part of the country."

"I wish you well, Stringer," said the Rector. "I am sure I wish you well. But promise me one thing. Let me know your address, and when these unhappy dissensions have blown over, as they are sure to do, we must do our best to bring you and your father into friendship again. Come, now; promise to let me know how you are doing and where you are."

"Well," answered Joseph, "I don't see any use in that, sir." To his mind the Church and the Army were so far from being friends that he would have felt it a sort of insult to mention the one in presence of a representative of the other. "Things 'll come right in their own time, I dare say, sir; and if they don't, sir, why, they'll stop as they are."

But Dr. Hay clung to him and got his promise at last, and Joseph marched off with outwardly staunch aspect. If he stopped and had an unobserved cry in a lonely meadow, that was nobody's affair but his own; and on the whole, whatever other people might think of him, he felt that he was acting both with courage and discretion.

CHAPTER V.

THE Rector of Thorbury was by no means a wealthy man, and he had a foolish unworldly knack of putting his hand in his pocket at any pitiful story which would have kept him in want of ready money if he had been a millionaire. Since the beginning of the War of the Surplices the subscriptions of the Church Restoration Fund had fallen off wofully. They had never come in in a very vigorous fashion, and the Rev. Dr. Denis Hay had more than once had occasion to bemoan himself with regard to his own enthusiasm. If things had been to do over again, he would assuredly have waited until he had had staff in hand. The treasure-trove came like a boon from Heaven, and when all the coins had been cleaned and assorted and catalogued, as well as his limited acquaintance with that sort of work would allow, he had put himself in communication with a certain Mr. Edward Matlock, a noted numismatist, at that time carrying on business in London. Mr. Matlock wrote in reply, expressing his interest in the discovery, and his willingness either to appraise or purchase the find, but he delayed his promised visit for a month or two, and did not present himself until Jonah's trial was over and done with, and Mr. Stringer's small household had grown smaller by one.

When he came he proved to be a grave high-dried personage, rather like a rural dean to look at. He wore a white neckcloth, which, though not of the clerical pat-

tern, helped out his clerical aspect, and in his right hand he balanced constantly between finger and thumb a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, as if he were beating time to the rhythm of unspoken cadences.

He appraised the coins at their fair market value to the huge disappointment of the Rector, who had set an absurdly high price upon them, but, being armed with a trade catalogue in which the latest rates of sale were duly set down, made his case clear at once. Dr. Hay took his check, Mr. Matlock took the coins, and the transaction was at a close. The trouble of the treasure-trove was not yet over, though of itself it might have been hardly worth relating. Yet but for it the history could never have turned out as it did, and the numismatist, though he spent but three hours in Thorbury, all told, unconsciously left such an embroilment behind him as an English parish in this nineteenth century can but rarely have known. The actual like of it certainly never happened elsewhere, and the intensity of it would alone have made it remarkable apart from its strangeness.

"A lover of old things," said the Rector, as he and his guest sat at luncheon together, "might care to see, perhaps, what we are doing here. Our church is really an excellent specimen of its style, but it has been most ignorantly maltreated, and we are trying to restore it to something like its original condition."

Mr. Matlock expressed himself as being interested, and the two, accompanied by Saint Sauveur, who had his home at the Rectory, had luncheon there, and set off together. The lectern took the antiquary's eye at once.

"Very noble," he said, walking round it, and balancing his glasses in his hand. "Very rich. Genuine bit of old stuff, that. Very genuine. Undoubted. Quite

excellent. Ah! And the chain and padlock. There has been one of the old Bibles here."

"We have it still," the Rector answered, "but it has fallen into decay. Perhaps I should rather say, disorder. It is little more than a loose bundle of leaves, but we keep it carefully. It is printed on vellum, and " —

"My dear sir!" cried the antiquary, "you must allow me to see it. You must really allow me."

"Certainly," said the Rector, "we keep it in the vestry here. I have gone over it, and, so far as I have observed, it is complete, so far as its pages go. It has suffered some dilapidation, and here and there a line or two has grown illegible. I think I have the key with me. Yes, here it is. You may see it at once."

"On vellum!" said the numismatist, with very much the tone in which an enthusiastic amateur in wine pronounces the date of a rare old vintage he is asked to taste.

Dr. Hay began to feel a new and unexpected pride in the presence of this old volume. He had hitherto had no more than an ignorant sentimental reverence for it. How many pious souls, thirsting for the truth, might have turned over its pages, and found for themselves the light of liberty there in the old early days when only that faint beam of freedom twinkled alone? Saints had bought with their blood the privilege to set that holy beacon in the Church's midst, and its warmth had comforted many and many a simple saintly heart since then. It was in that thought that Denis Hay had valued the ragged old volume, and perhaps after all it was there that its true worth lay. But as the numismatist turned its pages over from the en-

graved title-page to the colophon, and let off constant exclamations of delight, he began to have a new pride in it.

"I have no time for more than a cursory look at it," said Matlock, "but you have a real treasure here. There are perhaps two score copies on paper still extant, but on vellum! — Here, sir, is a treasure-trove worth much more than that which has just changed hands — richer in interest, richer in rarity, richer in historical associations. Why, sir, I would give my ears to own this volume. This, sir, is called the Treacle Bible, because of its substitution of the word treacle for the word balm in the text, which commonly reads 'Is there no balm in Gilead?' It was printed for the Bishops in the year 1568, and is otherwise known as the Bishops' Bible. A paper copy has its value, but a copy on vellum, my dear sir, on vellum!" —

"I had recognized its historic value," said the Rector, in a sort of apology. "I had always regarded it with a sort of reverence, and — and affection, if I may say so. But I had not known that" —

The enthusiastic antiquary cut him short.

"If you were in a position to sell that book, sir, and I were in a position to buy it, I would give you seven hundred pounds for it as it stands — provided, of course, that there are no leaves missing."

"Seven hunderd pound?" said a heavy voice behind the speaker. The three, turning, saw Mr. Isaac Stringer in the doorway, "Do you know what you're a-talking about?" he asked, advancing.

"I hope so, sir, I hope so," returned Matlock, eying him up and down, and even putting on his gold-rimmed glasses to do it the more effectually.

"Seven hunderd pound for that here heap o' crumpled ship-skin?" asked Isaac, pointing a solid forefinger at the volume, and returning the other's glance with something of disdain.

"Precisely, sir," said the antiquary, a little nettled by the other's tone and manner. "Seven hundred pounds. And the man who bought it at that price would have reason to be amply satisfied with his bargain."

The churchwarden, advancing a little further, fingered one or two of the pages with a doubtful hand, and shook his bullet head as if in condemnation of the verdict.

"A fool an' his money are soon parted," he said after a while, and then stood silent.

"I can give you the address of an excellent restorer," said Matlock, turning away with a shrug of the shoulders, and addressing himself to Dr. Hay. "It is a pity to have such a treasure in such a condition."

"The book shall be restored by all means," cried the Rector, with enthusiasm. "By all means."

"How many copies do you suppose to be in existence?" asked the organist.

"That I can't tell you," Matlock answered; "but there are very few companions to this — very few indeed. Reinemann will tell you. That's the fellow to go to. Luitpold Reinemann, book-restorer and facsimiler, 12, Cholmondeley Rents, Chancery Lane. If you'll give me a pencil I'll write down the address. Thank you. There you are. Luitpold — not Leopold. He has gone into partnership with a Scotchman, one MacWraith. I have done business with both of them in my time, but if you want a really valuable reference write to Soames at the British Museum — Mr. Algernon

Soames. Address him at the Library Department. That'll find him. Here, I'll give you his address as well. Beautiful old copy this is, to be sure. Look at the condition of the title-page."

He fondled the pages reverently, and Dr. Hay and the organist listened as he talked. Isaac listened also, and kept silence until the enthusiast turned the pages to the text in which appears the quaint reading which gives the edition its name.

"An odd reading," he said; "I wonder how it came about? Treacle for balm?"

"Didst never hear of treacle beer?" asked Isaac. "There used to be a good deal on it made in old days. I've known my mother talk about it. It's like enough they used treacle instead o' barm, and that's how the mistake came about, no doubt."

There was a general smile at this ingenious solution, and Stringer, himself, conscious of having untied a knot which puzzled his superiors in learning, looked well pleased. The mild cleric took the favorable moment.

"May I hope to have a friendly word with you by and by, Stringer?" he asked.

"Well," said Isaac, "I don't see the good of it. Better leave things as they be."

"Why, man," Saint Sauveur broke in, "you seem to come here in a friendly way for once. Why not find a reason for being friendly altogether?"

"I didn't address you, sir," returned Isaac. "Nor yet the Rector. I spoke to this gentleman, as, up to now, I've got no quarrel with."

The numismatist took another look at him, but said nothing, and Saint Sauveur and Dr. Hay exchanged a glance of humorous amusement as they turned. If

they had guessed to what tragic issues Isaac's presence there was going to lead them they would have worn more sober faces, but they were happily in the dark in that regard, and could still smile.

"I must catch my train," said Matlock, looking at his watch. "I should certainly have this seen to" — laying his hand upon the book — "if it were in my charge."

"I shall lose no time about it," the Rector answered. "I will write to-night."

A cab waited at the churchyard gates, and the expert was driven away towards the main-line railway station, five miles distant. The Rector and the organist shook hands with him as he departed, and Isaac lingered in the vestry, turning over the leaves of the Bishops' Bible, and wondering if the account he had heard given of its value could be true. Anything which went outside the sphere of his own knowledge was doubtful to him, unless he had heard it in his youth, when everything comes to all of us marked with the stamp of authenticity and prescription. He was more than half inclined to think the stranger a liar, and the Rector and the organist a pair of foolish dupes; but after mature deliberation he resolved to carry the question to the Chase and allow the Squire to adjudicate upon it.

Since Isaac's raid upon them, Dr. Hay had locked up his surplices, and only the authorized had access to the huge old cupboard in which they reposed. He cast a half-envious eye that way as he sat down upon the table, but, after all, he had done his duty there, had made his protest, and had every reason to be satisfied. He expected his enemies to return, and prepared to receive them with the dignified surliness which, as he conceived,

best became him in the circumstances. He had nothing in particular to think about, and his mind wandered hither and thither in his own interior crannies, carrying light into odd corners which had not been illuminated for years. He thought of his youth and of his courtship and marriage, of his mother and the quarrel which had parted them. That brought Joseph to mind, and somehow the suggestion occurred to him that perhaps Joseph had had more right on his side than he himself had had. But this was not a reflection to be endured for a moment, and he put it away from himself resolutely.

The vestry was stone-paved and cool in the hottest weather, and it held a sort of confined and cloistral air. Whether this had anything to do with Isaac's momentary lowness of spirits can only be conjectured, but he began to look forward with less than his usual complacency, and to foresee for himself an unpleasantly lonely and cold old age. He tried to shake this fancy off as he had shaken off the other, but it would not be dismissed. It settled down upon him, on the contrary, with a heavier and a heavier weight. The Scriptural phrase, "Joseph is not," got into his mind and troubled him. Mary would be getting married one of these days — that was only natural, though as yet there was no sign of it so far as he knew — and then he would be alone in the world. Nobody would have given him credit for these softened mournful musings as he sat swinging his legs on the table and staring at the black oak cupboard before him. His whole aspect was pugnacious, dogged, self-opinionated, as his life had been, and yet within doors he was feeling helpless, old, and lonely. It never occurred to him for an instant to bring Joseph home again, or to

make home homely for the one child who remained to him. But none the less he felt the one loss and saw the other coming.

Neither the Rector nor the organist came back again, and he had forgotten that he had been waiting for them. His original hope had been to strike a spark of anger out of one of them. Saint Sauveur had been generally ready of late days to give him his way in that respect, but he had never succeeded in angering Dr. Hay, which fact was a mortal trouble to him. He felt as if there were a tacit assumption of superiority concealed in it, as if it were not worth a cultured gentleman's while to lose temper in an affair with him. But for the time being he forgot that sorrow, and sat in a brown study, not being very clearly aware of what he was thinking about, but musing dimly, pretty much as an ox may, and yet, for all his dulness, not over-easy in his mind.

He was roused from his dream by the noise made by the opening and closing of the door which led from the churchyard into the vestry, and, turning round with a sudden sullen hope of combat, faced Habakkuk Wood, the sexton. The old man pottered in with a bunch of great keys, which he hung upon a nail in the wall, keeping an eye sideways on the churchwarden in the meantime.

"Afternoon, Wood," said Isaac, with a sort of lordly condescension.

Habakkuk nodded, but said nothing, and at this Mr. Stringer, who was in a mood to take umbrage at anything, spoke somewhat sharply.

"Did you hear as I passed the afternoon with you, Wood?"

"I'm none so deaf as all that," the sexton answered.

"Then," demanded Isaac, "why didn't you return my salutation in a becomin' manner, as befits your station?"

"This is a free country," returned Habakkuk. "At least, folks say so."

"Oho!" said Stringer. "You're a-turning impident, are you? Now don't you let me have any of your nonsense, or I'll pretty quick find a way to cure you."

"If you want to be civil spoke to," said the sexton, "be civil spoke yourself, gaffer."

"Civil!" retorted the churchwarden, angrily. "Why, I passed the hafternoon as affable as if you'd been my equil."

"Maybe you did," said the sexton, ambling towards the door by which he had entered, but turning his inflamed countenance and angry eye upon his interlocutor.

"Why, you're doddering," Stringer growled; "you're losing your wits."

"Ah!" snarled the old fellow, turning full upon him. "Goo an' be a backbiter. Do. Goo an' take away a honest lad's character. Talk about him up an' down the parish, an' mek a byword on him. Then call yourself a Christian, an' set up to put the church to rights, and know better than the Rector."

"You're a-talkin' about your son Jonah, I persoom?" said Mr. Stringer, with a lofty air. "The man as teks his character away'll do him a rare service."

"Who gi'en him the character he's got?" cried Habakkuk, advancing a step or two. "How'd you like me to trapse up an' down the High Street, an' in an' out of all the bye-roads, to talk about your lad? Look at

home, gaffer! Let my Jonah be as bad as iver he wool, I've niver had to turn him out o' doors yet." The fierce old fellow shook both hands in the air before him. "I was sexton here when you was born, an' I can mind me o' your younger days. Did you niver do a bit o' poachin' of a shiny night? Theer's rare liars in Thorbury else. Don't you throw stones at my glass housen, gaffer, or maybe I shall put a bibble into a pane o' yourn. Look after your own lad, and leave me to mine. Jonah ain't the only wastrel i' the parish, by your own showin'."

"Do you dare to even up your brat with mine?" demanded the churchwarden, who was not in a humor to pick his phrases.

"Even him?" retorted the sexton. "No. My lad's snug an' comfortable in his feyther's house this minute. *He's* niver done anythin' disgracious as I've had to turn him out to tramp the world for."

"Get out, ye pisonous-tongued old viper!" cried Isaac passionately. "Speak to me again, and I'll put you across my knee and break you."

"Ah!" said Habakkuk, "who's a-brawlin' in the gate o' the Temple? You're a pretty sample Christian, you are, gaffer. Turnin' your own flesh and blood out into the street, an' settin' flock and shepherd by the ears, and tekin' away deservin' lads' characters, an' threatenin' old age. You're a picter, you are, tek *my* word for it."

"Go your way," returned Stringer, rising to a dull dignity, "and thank your years for whole bones. I'll waste no more words upon you."

"That's a mercy," said the sexton. "You'd niver a good un yit, for man, woman, or child. You hadn't

one for the mother as bore you, for half a dozen years. You was born a crab-apple, an' a crab-apple you'll stick. Fit for naught but to set folks' teeth on edge."

"Wood!" cried the churchwarden, solemnly, "you're abusin' your privileges. Tek care you don't carry on so far as to mek me abuse mine. I'll give you the best word you ever heard in *your* life. Go!"

"I've said my say," replied Habakkuk, "and the j'y o' lookin' at thee is none so great as I feel any call to stop for it."

With that Parthian shot he shambled out, slamming the door noisily behind him. Isaac looked at the door as if he still beheld the enemy, and in a while, taking up his shining silk hat from the table, began to brush it mechanically with his sleeve, growling and muttering meanwhile in deep anger. Then he fell back gradually into something like the brown study from which the sexton's entrance had aroused him. But this time he was conscious of his own thoughts, and he scarcely found them agreeable companions. The banished Joseph was the chief figure in them, and, oddly enough, Joseph was pleading, and pleading with no shocking air of unreason, that he might, perhaps, have a little right on his side if he were regarded fairly. The plea was faint and half-hearted—the real Joseph would have put it, perhaps, in such a fashion as to seem offensive—but Isaac was not wholly indisposed to give ear to it. Perhaps—perhaps, when a young man has come to three-and-twenty he might have some legitimate ground of complaint at being treated constantly like a baby. Perhaps his sense of dignity might sometimes have revolted—not unnaturally.

Isaac put on his hat and walked homewards, musing

by the way. He was very silent at the tea-table, and he smoked his pipe and read his paper all the evening without a word till supper-time. But when the last meal of the day was over, and Mary came to give him her usual formal good-night kiss, he opened his lips.

“Good-night, my wench. I suppose you reckon on hearing from Joseph one of these near days?”

“Yes, father.”

“You can let me have a look at his letter when he writes. Good-night.”

CHAPTER VI.

IT has become pretty evident already that this is a story of quarrel, and that almost everybody concerned in it is or will be at daggers-drawn with everybody else. A stranger visiting Thorbury would have thought it a home of perfect peace, and might, after staying in it for an hour or two, have left it under the belief that he had visited an English Arcadia. A more tranquil, peaceful place to look at it would be hard to find — a sleepier, less eventful-looking village. An air of repose brooded everywhere, and nowhere more notably than about the Chase, where Marmaduke Boyer lived in the house of his forefathers. The fine old Tudor mansion stood far removed from the country road, and overlooked its surrounding trees from the top of a gentle eminence. There was an old sun-dial on the lawn before the door, crumbled away from its ancient use and left to its natural decay, as if Time had ceased to be a thing of interest or moment. Half the pleasaunce about the house ran wild, though the trimmed half was smooth and orderly enough, and the lawn itself was a model of what a lawn should be — smooth as a billiard board, and like velvet to the tread. The house was in the very beauty of its sturdy age. A new house suggests labor, noise, and raw material; but an old house no more brings these things to mind than the contemplation of a tree would do. Time has reconciled it to its place, and it looks indigenous to the landscape.

Far away in the haze of an autumn evening the wood-clad hills of Breckley looked like a blue smoke. The sun was down already, the birds were settling, even thus early, into quiet, and deep peace and silence reigned over the whole country-side. Now and again the faintest sigh of wind would stir the leaves, as if the coming night were pensive, and full of a mild and gentle sadness. In the exquisite stillness which followed every one of these faint gusts an attentive ear might catch the placid babble of the brook which sounded like a voice murmuring in a dream. It ran through the grounds at no great distance from the house itself, and was spanned by two pretty little rustic bridges, which lent their own quota of charm to the landscape, and looked, as the house did, like a native part of it. Whilst all Nature was preparing for its nightly rest without, and the slowly darkening house grew to look more and more like the very birthplace and home of Rest, that peppery fox-colored Squire and his son were having a royal row within. It was the first they had ever had in their lives, for it takes two to make a quarrel, and until this evening Frank had resolutely refused to quarrel with his father, though the elder gentleman had by no means neglected to provide him with opportunity. The lad had a sincere affection for his father, and a natural respect and reverence. If it had not been for his uncontrolled bursts of passion the Squire would have been all round an excellent fellow. His son admired his good qualities, and until now had always allowed the storm to blow as it pleased, and had never fretted it into unnatural wildness by opposition.

The two had dined together rather silently, but with

no hint of want of temper on either side, and then Master Frank had walked into the hall, and possessed himself of his hat, with intent to stroll down to the Rectory and contrive a meeting with Ophelia. The contrivance was easy, for Ophelia always waited and watched at this hour at her own bedroom window, until her lover roamed in sight, and she would run out and meet him. The excellent Rector and his excellent wife were fully aware of this proceeding on the part of the young people, but they both believed and hoped with all their hearts that the Squire's ill-temper would blow over, and they saw no use in making the two young people unhappier than the temporary obstacle to their hopes was sure to make them.

The Squire tapped the dining-room window as Frank appeared upon the lawn, and when his son turned in answer to this signal he beckoned him with a rather imperative wave of the hand.

"Where are you going?" he asked, as the young fellow re-entered the dining-room.

"Oh!" said Frank, practising the *suppressio veri*; "I'm going out for a stroll."

"And where do you intend that your stroll should lead you?"

Now Frank had never told his father a lie in his life, and at five-and-twenty deceit is rather a difficult thing to begin. Like many other arts that of lying must be begun young and practised, or it rarely comes to anything.

"I'd rather you wouldn't ask, sir," he said. He had been wondering so long why the paternal storm had not broken, that at last he had ceased to believe that it was going to break at all. But now he knew that it was

coming, and he braced himself for the first time to defy his father's will. Not his father, nor any thing nor any man nor any combination of things and men should make him unfaithful to Ophelia for an hour.

"Well, now," said his father, quiet enough as yet upon the surface, "I'd rather you'd tell me, if you please."

"If you insist, sir." The young man made one propitiatory effort before he obeyed. "You're one of the most amiable men in the world, father, and you can't nurse a grievance long." This was a filial delusion of his, and was helped out by the general delusion that people with hasty tempers are easily forgiving and forgetful. "I'd a great deal rather you hadn't asked me until a certain little quarrel has blown over."

"I dare say," said the Squire, "but I prefer to ask you now. Where were you going?"

"I was going to meet Ophelia."

Then the storm burst with wind and deluge, and the young man bowed his head to it and said nothing for a while. But when the passionate man forbade him to speak to his sweetheart again, or to look at her on pain of his displeasure, he positively laughed, in a disdainful angry wonder, at the order. The Squire paused at the laugh. It seemed to strike him dumb.

"I'm sorry you think and feel like that, sir," Frank said, in a rather tremulous voice. He had a good deal of his father in him, and it cost him something not to let the old gentleman see a copy of himself. "I hope we're not going to be ill friends about it, but I shall never alter. I thought you knew of what was going on, and that you were contented."

"You're a liar!" stormed his father.

"No, I'm not, sir," Frank answered. Mere abuse from his father never angered him. He was practised in it and knew what it was worth. "You know I'm not, and you'd kick any other man who said I was."

"To have my son marrying the niece of that infernal old canting Papistical meddler in other men's affairs —" cried Boyer, skipping from that false standpoint.

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Frank, when he could get a word in edgewise. "I'm very sorry that you take it in this way. I have asked Ophelia to marry me, and she has promised. I had asked Dr. Hay's consent on the very day on which you had a row with him about that poaching rascal, Jonah Wood. I came home to ask yours, and you know very well, sir, that if I could have seen you before the shindy began you would have given it."

"Hold your tongue, sir!" roared the Squire.

"But I beg your pardon, father. I can't hold my tongue, and I must not hold my tongue. I've been a fairly good son, and in all reasonable matters I'm ready to obey you. But here I can't."

"You'd take a different tone if the estate weren't entailed," said his father.

"Suppose we quarrel like gentlemen, sir," Frank suggested; and then whatever relic of self-possession the elder man had left vanished entirely for the moment. He roared so that the servants heard him, and gathered in a listening excited group in the hall. He'd ruin the estate, he'd beggar the worthless blackguard who defied him, he'd never see him or speak to him more.

"Leave my house to-night on that errand, and leave it forever so long as I am in it."

"That ought to be enough for any man," said Frank, "and it should be enough for me if I thought you meant it."

"Mean it? By heaven, I mean it!"

"You don't," said his son, facing him in a dogmatic resolve not to lose his own self-control. "Did I ever wilfully give you a trouble in my life? Do you mean to tell me that father and son are going to part like this after five-and-twenty years' friendship?" At this he grew himself suddenly softened. "Come, dad; we've always been good friends. Why should we quarrel? I've heard you say yourself that Ophelia's the best and prettiest girl for twenty miles round. And so she is, and for five thousand for that matter. Why shouldn't I marry a blameless beautiful girl, who's my equal in station, and my superior in everything else, if I've set my heart that way, and if she'll have me?"

"That's enough!" said the Squire, throwing himself with a crash into an armchair, and waving a backward hand of renunciation. "Go your own way. But never darken my doors again."

"Very well," returned Frank. "But before I go, look here. I'm no party to this idiotic shindy. I'm just as fond of you as ever I was, and this row is going to make no difference at all to my feelings. I'll tell Walker to send down a portmanteau to the Fox and Dogs. Good-night, dad."

"Good-by," growled the Squire, with his back turned, and the set of his shoulders full of obstinacy and anger.

Frank looked at him in silence for a minute, sighed, as if he recognized the hopelessness of expostulation, and then marched away sore-hearted. He gave his fare-

well orders in his father's house, and, lingering a little on the threshold, walked on to the lawn. He turned there to look at the darkening building, which had not as yet a single light in any of its windows, and, standing there, was aware that his father had opened the French windows of the dining-room and was looking towards him.

Seeing that his presence was perceived, Marmaduke walked forward a dozen swift and angry paces.

"You understand what it means?" he said. "You know what you're doing?"

"I do, father," the young man answered regretfully. "I wish you did. I'm leaving the best friend I ever had, because he bids me be a scoundrel. Good-by. You're a good man, after all, and a just man, and you'll see the rights and wrongs of this one day as I do." The father broke in with a curse and a passionate gesture. "Ah, you will, though! You're not the man to hold an ounce of malice, and you know in your own heart that you're wrong, this minute. There! I won't make things worse than they are. Good-by and God bless you, dad, and that's the worst word you shall ever hear from me."

That was the end of the scene, for Marmaduke walked away without further speech, and Frank went heavily towards the Rectory, hanging his head somewhat, and feeling extremely dejected and unhappy, as was natural, all things considered. One bitterness was spared him. He had money in plenty, for a maiden aunt had left him her fortune, and all his mother's possessions had come into his hands when he was at the age of one-and-twenty. He had money enough to marry on for that matter, but to have urged on the marriage whilst the Squire and the Rector had ill-blood between them would

have only been to secure a feud between his father and himself, and to marry now before a reconciliation could be effected could only perpetuate eternally the strife already begun.

But, light as his burdens were in comparison with what they might have been, he found them hard enough to bear. He was fond of his father, had loved him always with a warm-hearted affection, and he was grieved to the quick at his injustice and unreasonableness. Now and then, as was only natural, an impulse of anger shot through him, but he stilled it always, and would have no passion in his heart. It was enough to have one angry man in a family, and if there were sure to be an unfounded rage somewhere it should at least be all on one side.

He strolled on almost mechanically, and was so absorbed that he had even forgotten that he was out in the hope of meeting his sweetheart; but his footsteps led him in the accustomed direction, and before he knew it he was pacing the familiar path in the field which faced Ophelia's windows. He wandered to and fro, deep sunk in thought, until the girl ran up to him with noiseless feet upon the meadow turf, and laid a hand upon his arm. Then he turned, and, taking the hand in both of his, bent a mournful look upon her.

"Frank," she asked, "is there anything the matter? Why do you look so grave?"

"Did I look grave, dear?" he asked in answer. "I suppose I did. I have had an unpleasant scene at home. My father is very angry, and for a while, at least, I shall have to steer clear of him."

"What is he angry about?" she demanded anxiously.

"Oh," said Frank, "it's nothing after all. It will

pass. You know his way. The best heart in the world, but an infirmity of temper. He has been very unreasonable to-night, and asked me to do an utterly absurd and ridiculous thing — a most unheard-of and impossible thing. I declined, and we had something very like a row. It will pass. He will see in a week or two how wrong he was.”

“Frank, dear,” asked Ophelia, still leaving her hand between his two, “was he angry about me — about us?”

“Well, yes, love,” Frank answered, not too ingenuously. “I must confess that came in. But you mustn’t worry about it. It will all come right. And in the meantime we have other things to talk about. I am putting up at the inn to-night, and in the morning” —

“Oh, Frank! Is it as grave as that?”

“Yes, darling, for the time being it is as grave as that.”

“He asked you to give me up? Was that the impossible thing?”

“It was just the most impossible thing you can think of,” he answered. “Find anything more impossible than that if you can, and I give you leave to think he ordered it.”

“And I am separating you? Oh, Frank!”

“My darling, you are doing nothing of the kind. *He* is separating us — not you and me — but himself and me. I don’t think I spoke an angry or undutiful word. I certainly tried not to. But leave all that apart just now. I am going up to London for a little while, to give him time to cool and think things over. I shall write to him in a week or two, and make ap-

proaches. Then, if he comes round, well and good. If not, I shall come and live near you until such time as we can get married."

"But Frank, dear," she said, reluctantly, "you won't like to estrange your father."

"My dear Ophelia," said Frank, rather masterfully, "I don't want to estrange my father. I am doing nothing to estrange him. It is he who, for the present, is trying — and failing — to estrange me. Let us talk of other things, dearest. I sha'n't see you again for weeks. How hollow that makes the world look."

They talked of other things, and in the growing darkness walked up and down the footway in the shelter of the hedge, he with his arm about her waist, and she with her head upon his shoulder. When it came to parting, she shed a tear or two, and he took her to his heart and comforted her, like a lover. He kissed her, and the whole world faded out of sight — all trouble and all sense of parting lost. And whilst they stood thus, entranced in one another's arms, heart beating against heart, and lip clinging to lip, a voice spoke, with startling nearness, and they started guiltily from each other, assuming attitudes of the profoundest commonplace and innocence, calculated to deceive nobody. But, luckily, the autumn night had settled altogether by this time, and things a dozen yards away were indistinguishable.

"If Ah had that man in ma haands," said the disturbing voice, "Ah'd just throttle 'm, and there an end. Ah'd teach the lyin', false-hearted blackyard to mislead strangers!"

"I should like to help," said another voice. "Vere are ve? It is enough to make a man sveal."

"You have lost your way, gentlemen?" cried Frank.
"Can I direct you?"

"Thank Heaven!" said the first voice. "At long last here's somebody. We're sairching for a place called Thorburry."

"You are in Thorbury already, sir."

"Your lying plackguard vos right, afder all," said voice number two. "Do you know the Rectory, sir?"

"You see its lights before you."

The two strangers scrambled over the stile on which they had leaned whilst making inquiry, and it could be seen that each carried a valise. The two marched with an air of some fatigue.

"Tank you," said the German-sounding voice, and the Scotch-sounding voice drawled after it, in a tone of scant politeness, "Thaank ye."

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but I'm an old friend of the Rector's, and this is rather an odd hour for a visit. I don't ask the nature of your business, but is it pressing?"

"We're expected," said the Scot. "We should have arrived this afternoon, but we missed a local train. This is ma partner, Mr. Luitpolt Reinemann, and ma own name is MacWraith, at your sairvice. It's our business to restore an auld Bible doon here, an we're guests at the Rectory till it's finished."

"Permit me to accompany you, gentlemen."

The four set out in silence across the field together.

CHAPTER VII.

MESSRS. REINEMANN and MacWraith being introduced to the Rectory-hall, and a minute or two later to the drawing-room, turned out highly respectable to look at. MacWraith was dressed in the newest black broadcloth, and wore a little turn-down false collar and the skimpiest of black ties. He was black-gloved also, and his hair, which was sandy alike in color and in texture, was plenteously oiled with an eye to the reduction of its tone. Everything he wore was a trifle too small for him excepting only his gloves and boots, which, in contrast with his generally scanted aspect, loomed formidably large. He had a pair of nervous, shifty, red-brown eyes, to which a faint cast gave a look of vagueness at times, though at other moments, when the cast disappeared, they were very bright and piercing. His upper lip was clean-shaven — which, if he had only known it, was something of a misfortune for him — but he wore a rim of close-cropped beard and whiskers of a hue a trifle more aggressive than that of his sandy head. His complexion was of the color of cold boiled veal, and his manner was vitriolically oily. Reinemann was fat and ponderous, and looked the bigger for having everything he wore too large for him. He, like his partner, was dressed in black broadcloth, and he likewise shone, but with the subdued lustre of long wear. At the elbows and the knees and on the rounded slopes of his great shoulders, he glistened with a reputable well-brushed

age. He had a great upstanding mop of black hair, a thin hooked nose between his fat creased smiling cheeks, and merry beady eyes which glittered like black gems. The two had left their portmanteaus in the hall, but they had carried in their hats, and stood side by side, ceremoniously bowing. They were eminently respectable, but scarcely seemed at home, or accustomed to their present surroundings.

"You have been delayed, gentlemen?" said Dr. Hay, advancing to shake hands with them. "I had not expected to have the pleasure of meeting you this evening."

"We have missed the train," answered Reinemann beamingly, "but, dear sir, we are here."

"We have tramped a little matter of four miles," said MacWraith, somewhat bitterly, "bearing our baggage with us. We had begun to fear that we had been misdirected, when this young gentleman came to our rescue."

The Rector raised his eyebrows at Frank's presence in the doorway.

"You would like to see your rooms," he said. "Allow me to conduct you. Mary, bring candles for these gentlemen."

They followed him and the spruce housemaid up the stairs, still nursing their hats, and the man-servant followed with the luggage. The Rector bustled back again to see that his visitors should have the where-withal to refresh themselves after their journey, and when his cares in that direction were over, went back to the drawing-room. There he found Frank alone, for Mrs. Hay and Ophelia were assisting the hospitable preparations.

"You know I am always heartily pleased to see you, Frank," he began; "but don't you think that, as matters stand, your father will think this something of a slight upon him? I would rather you waited for things to adjust themselves a little."

"My father won't know of this," the young man answered. "It happens that I am not going home to-night."

This naturally astonished Dr. Hay a little, but he had no time or chance for asking further questions just then. Mr Reinemann, rubbing his hands and beaming, came creakingly downstairs, with Mr. MacWraith in his rear. The fat German's boots talked complainingly at every footstep, and at every instant of every footstep, but his collaborateur followed him as noiseless as a foe, as if he walked on velvet.

"Supper is served in the dining-room, gentlemen," cried the Rector. "This way, if you please."

He made an excellent host with his quiet mild bonhomie, and his genuine unostentatious warmth of welcome.

The visitors were provided with excellent appetites and stood in no need of urging to fall to. The host sat down to carve and, if it might be, to enliven the meal with converse.

"I suppose, gentlemen," he said, by way of a beginning, "that you are acquainted with most that is rare and curious amongst old books?"

"We are, sir," returned MacWraith in his saw-like voice. "Pass the mustard."

His colleague obliged him.

"I can fancy," said the Rector, "that there are not many occupations fuller of interest than your own."

"Not many," MacWraith responded. "Salt."

"I can hardly conceive an occupation more enchanting," said Dr. Hay.

"It is a jarming oggubation," Mr. Reinemann assented, with an air of some reluctance, as if he would rather less talk shop just then than stick to the moment's business.

"Ah'd just defy ye," said MacWraith, resting upon his knife and fork, and facing his host as if he had a grudge against him; "Ah'd just defy ye, or any man else, to find a more pleasing."

Somehow the conversation languished after this until Mrs. Hay, Ophelia, and Frank came in, and bestowing themselves about the room made talk for the amusement of the convives. Suddenly Mr. MacWraith dropped a sort of social *obus*.

"It's like feeding in a menagerie," he said, addressing his colleague in German, "to sit and eat with all these eyes upon ye."

Mrs. Hay's eyebrows sent the most delicate of semaphore signals across to Ophelia. The two ladies went out, and Frank, with a commendable gravity, followed.

"Ye'll excuse me for forgetfulness, sir," said MacWraith; "Ah'm in the habit of speaking German with my colleague."

"It is one of our little household amusements here," the Rector answered. "We shall be glad to join you in your practice, and to correct our pronunciation, which is a little insular, I am afraid."

"You vas vell caught that dime, Mac," said Mr. Reinemann, speaking with his mouth full, and smiling broadly at the same time.

For the rest of that evening Mr. MacWraith was not to be comforted, and it was a charity to let him have his way when he pleaded fatigue and the lateness of the hour as an excuse for retiring to his chamber. His partner accompanied him. They had already made the discovery that their bedrooms were side by side, and had a communicating door; and now, having locked the outer doors, MacWraith produced a whiskey bottle from his valise, and followed it with a pipe and a packet of tobacco.

“Ah suppose tobacco’s taboo here,” he said, “but Ah’ll not go without my smok’ for any man.”

He poured out a glass of whiskey for himself rather liberally, helped his companion with a lighter hand, and then, having opened the window, sat down to smoke.

“Ve shall have dull dimes here, Mac,” said the senior partner, lighting up also.

“They’ll be no duller than Ah can help,” returned MacWraith. “What’s the auld fool want bringin’ us down here? Why couldn’t we have done the wark in town, Ah’d like to know? Does he think we’re going to steal his buik?”

“Not so loud, Mac, not so loud,” interjected the other. “Ve shall have dull dimes, but ve shall be baid preddy vell. Eh? Not? Vot? Eh, Mac? Ve shall be baid preddy vell. And ve shall not vork too hard. Eh?”

“Ah’m not going to spoil the market by making anything seem too easy,” said Mr. MacWraith. “It’s a great error, that, with some folks. Slow and sure’s my motto. Slow work — sure payment.”

The fat Reinemann, idly sipping his whiskey and

water and puffing at his pipe, smiled approval at his companion.

"It vill not cost us anything to lif here," he murmured, by and by. "It vill be dull, but it vill be jeap. Thot is always somethings. Eh?"

"Ay!" MacWraith assented, drowsy with the enjoyment of his pipe. "We've just got to make the best of it. And, man!" he added, waking up suddenly and speaking with suppressed energy, "that's grand beef below-stairs. The claret's a fine table wine, too. These bloated dignitaries o' the English Church fettle themselves right well, ma friend."

"I shall not crumple at that," said Reinemann, "so long as they fettle me."

"No," returned his partner, "Ah've noticed that aboot ye. So long as ye're pretty well provided for ye care very little for other folk. But let me tell ye that's not a characteristic to brag of. Ah wouldn't boast about it."

Whatever this acid maundering might mean, Mr. Reinemann paid but the smallest attention to it. He smoked at a big porcelain pipe with a painted lady on it, until he had had enough tobacco for his fancy, and then, rising, began to divest himself of coat and waistcoat. At the hint MacWraith withdrew to the apartment which had been made over to him, and there, in due time, got to bed with his head done up in a curiously knotted handkerchief, lest the hair-oil he used should soil the snowy pillow-case.

The odors of tobacco and whiskey floated out of window on the air of the mild autumn night to the nostrils of Master Frank, who had possessed himself of the key to the front door of the Fox and Dogs by this time, and was prowling round the premises to be

near Ophelia for this last night at home, and to steep his heart in such dreams as lovers are haunted with upon the like occasion. Odes to moon and stars, unrhymed, unformed; gusts of fancy and feeling of a thousand turns and windings, which had but one direction after all; passionate heats of heart, and sweet brooding blessings; and over all an infinite vague longing and worship, such as that with which some men in youth look out on the infinite and unknown; all these kept fancy and feeling busy, and made the night a revel of thought and sensation. "To be near thee — to be near thee — alone is peace for me!" Oh, the brave days when one is five-and-twenty and in love. There is none like them, none, nor shall be till our summers have deceased. And the strange thing about them is that we always flatter ourselves that we are unhappy whilst we enjoy them, and look back to them as times of unattainable, unforgettable happiness, when they are flown away for good and all.

The young man, in the mysterious dim light of the late rising moon, made a pilgrimage to the gates of the house in which he was born, and carried thither his own heart-picture of Ophelia lying in spotless virginal innocence and soft radiance like an angel on a cloud. He thought tenderly of the passionate old fellow indoors there, and had a kind of wonder that the thought of Ophelia's youth, gentleness, goodness, and beauty could not somehow make him less hard and wilful. To himself they were all-persuasive. We are all idolaters in youth — thank Heaven! — and Frank was sunk fathoms deep and lifted sky-high by turns in worship of Ophelia.

Resign her? he asked himself as he stood looking at the shadowy old house. Resign her? He thought of

his own laughter in answer to that command a few hours earlier, and his soul laughed again, in a deeply silent triumph, scorn, and tenderness, such as only lovers know. Resign her? Rather resign his own being, and suffer complete extinction — be blotted out of life and go. Oh! wilful, hard old man, is there no vision of these things in thy slumbering heart — no knowledge of them in that night-capped head? Good-by, thou foolish, violent, and yet beloved. Heaven will soften and persuade thee. The stars shall fight in their courses against thy worst and with thy better half.

The stars of the kind autumn night looked down on the lover, lambent and pitying. The autumn dew upon his face was like a mist of celestial tears. All men are poets in their hours of pain or passion. The lad went marvelling at himself when this rage of inspiration was over, and of course blessed and thanked Ophelia for its wonders, for in those days, oh, 'twas Ophelia, 'twas Ophelia, who made the world go round. Blest idiotcy! where is the wisdom which brings its gray votaries a tithe's tithe of its pleasure?

So, back to the Fox and Dogs, along the deserted village street. On this night of farewells everything is lovable. The inn-sign, with its comic virtues half revealed by the oil lamp over the door — the incredible fox with three unbelievable white wooden hounds with their mouths open and tapering sterns uplifted and all four beasts wedged immovable into a pea-green meadow — even that quaint bit of village art must have its good-by said to it in a blending of humor and sadness. There was something unfamiliar in the village street, a something memorable there, unnoticed until now. He knew he would see it so in after times.

Frank had ordered lights and writing materials to his room, and wore out his candles in the vain effort to write a letter to his father. All his thoughts were too big to float in his inkstand, and not one of them was launched that night. If he had felt but half as much he could have got a nice filial persuasive letter upon paper, but as it was he had to go away in silence. He burnt the torn fragments of his letters in the grate of his bedchamber, and the chimney being stuffed up against ventilation, after the old inn fashion, the pungent smoke of the paper half choked him and set him coughing. He threw open his window, which looked upon the fields, and when his eyes were cleared of the tears the smoke had brought to them, he saw a shadowy figure beneath a hedge at a distance of a hundred yards or so, and knew it for the figure of Jonah. The young man laughed rather forlornly to himself to think that this gaunt rustic was the *fons et origo* of his troubles. Jonah was at his poaching tricks again, of course. What else should bring him secretly slouching home at three o'clock of a moonlit autumn morning, taking guilty vantage of ditch and hedgerow?

Frank had breakfasted and was away Londonwards with his filial letter still unwritten before Messrs. Reinemann and MacWraith were awake. The manservant who took those gentlemen their shaving water sniffed accusingly at the lingering odor of tobacco smoke which still hung about the curtains in spite of the opened window of the night before. A single pipe of a night in the coachman's room over the stable was not out of the man's way, but tobacco within the Rectory itself was in a sort a desecration. Not even the young Squire had ever allowed himself to smoke within those precincts.

Even if they noticed his accusatory sniffings and significant glances at the signs of crime, the offenders were too hardened in their wickedness to care for his disapproval. They dressed, and, at the ringing of the breakfast-bell, descended. The sight of the well-furnished table bred content within their souls, and they ate and drank with splendid appetite and enjoyment. Then when they had had an hour for their own devices, and had taken a surface-look at the village, and had undergone examination and criticism in their own persons from its inhabitants, the Rector took them to the church and introduced them to the Bishops' Bible.

"Yes," said Reinemann, when he and his partner had examined the venerable volume carefully, "ve can make a chob of that. Ve can make a very nice satisfactory goot chob of it, but it vill dake dime."

"You must take your own time, of course, gentlemen," returned Dr. Hay; and then ensued certain business details, in which the partners cheated him as far as they dared. They might have gone further if they had only known it, for they had to do with one of the simplest creatures in the world, who thought every living creature honest, and loved his neighbor as himself, poor man, and would have been horribly ashamed of the mere suspicion that anybody was trying to wrong him. In this transaction Reinemann took the hopeful optimistic view, and MacWraith did the doleful part of the business. It was MacWraith who saw all the difficulties, it was he who pointed out all the dilapidations.

"Yes, yes," Reinemann always assented, "but ve shall make a goot chob of it at de finish. You vill hartly know your book again. Vait a month, sir, vait a month. You shall see vot you shall see."

The precious tome was carried tenderly to the Rectory, and there the two visitors were installed in a room set apart for them. There they got the implements of their art about them, and worked all day, emerging only at meal-times. Dr. Hay made occasional incursions, watching their labors in a smiling silence, and growing hourly fonder and fonder of his treasure, and exulting mildly meanwhile over his beautiful church. He made occasional excursions to see how that was getting on, and was as absorbed and happy in his two joys as man well can be, until he awoke to the reflection that with this merely worldly or secular work of restoring Bibles and churches he was forgetting higher things, and so, with inward reproaches, undertook to banish his pleasures from his mind.

Incidentally he learnt much in the course of the next week or two of title-pages and colophons, and rare editions of this, that, and the other famous work, for Mr. Reinemann was disposed to conversation as he grew used to his new surroundings, and would flow out genially about his own experiences. But in spite of all he had to occupy him, the Rector missed the Squire and he missed Frank, the latter almost bitterly, for, in his own self-accusing, tender-conscienced way, he accused his own meddling rather than Boyer's vile temper, and held himself more than half responsible for the young man's severance from his father. For another thing, he was afraid of boring his own household with his enthusiasms, and Frank and his father would alike have shared them at one time. Now he had only Saint Sauveur to fall back upon, Saint Sauveur was enthusiastic about little but music, unless, indeed, it were his old friend and college chum and present patron, whom he would

openly proclaim to be the best man that ever wore shoe leather.

Ernest Saint Sauveur had reason for that opinion, for when his French property went to the mischief in one of the political convulsions in which France seems fated to pass a great deal of her time, Dr. Denis Hay was the only one of all his old friends who held out a hand to him. The Huguenot French gentleman, by breeding and education, had come to be nine-tenths English. English village life suited him to perfection, and his choir and organ kept him in sufficient occupation. He lounged a good deal because he really could not help it, and saw no other way of putting in his time. Almost of necessity he saw much of the restorers at their employment, and at length became so interested in their work that he would spend whole hours in watching them. Mr. MacWraith's asperities and Mr. Reinemann's contrasting oiliness of benevolence amused him, and the whole thing came as a welcome distraction to a man only one quarter occupied.

But for some reason Messrs. Reinemann and MacWraith were not as fond of being watched as Saint Sauveur was of watching, and one Sunday afternoon, as they strolled in the fields together in their respectable black, a little conversation on the subject ensued between them.

"The game has its risks in any case, my friend," said MacWraith; "and it's just a providence that we haven't been nailed a year ago. Ah'm not denying that it's profitable, but it's very risky, and risky in more ways than one. When Ah think of the learned ijiots we've fooled in our time I just have to laugh. But we can't do our work with that French felly always hanging

about us, and Ah'll have to get away to London once a week or so and labor by myself for half the time. Ah'll expect my extra labors to be respected and counted for in the end; but that we'll talk about later on."

"Yes," Reinemann asserted, "you had pedder co. But I don't see vy you should dalk about your labors, my friend, any more than I dalk about my labors, my friend. Vile you do the bogus I do the real, and von is no harter than the other. You can have a letter the day after to-morrow if you write for it to-night, and you can be called up to town on imbortant business. Eh? Not? Very well. If you think your vork is harter than mine I'll take yours and ve'll share alike. Eh? Vot?"

A listener might have thought that these gentlemen were plotting to substitute an imitation for the valuable and genuine old volume they manipulated. But then they both looked most highly respectable, and it was beyond doubt that in their day they occupied a most excellent position in their own line of business. A game of that kind would indeed have been risky, and in the long run could have been worth no able artificer's while.

CHAPTER VIII.

OPHELIA was crying, and Dr. Hay knew not whether to be more alarmed or astonished at that unwonted spectacle. There are some girls who are always crying, or drying their tears, or getting ready to cry, but Ophelia was not of that watery sisterhood, any more than she was of that opposing creed whose tutelary deity is the merry, merry Zingara who laughs ha, ha! on what appears to be inadequate provocation. Ophelia was a young woman of well-balanced mind and affections, and no oftener laid the dust of the desert with her tears than she could help. The Rector had known nothing like this for a dozen years, and knew not what to make of it or what to do.

It was a charming autumn morning, and Messrs. Reinemann and MacWraith had been at work on the Bishops' Bible for about a month, more or less, when Dr. Hay, walking unexpectedly into the morning-room, beheld this unusual and embarrassing sight. He had not the clearest eyes in the world, and his spectacles being perched up on his forehead, he did not at first make out the character of the tragedy, but as he opened the door he distinctly heard a sob, and before he could arrest himself he had passed the threshold and stood face to face with his niece. An involuntary action snatched the glasses down upon his nose, and for one frightened moment Ophelia regarded him, and breaking anew into tears, ran past him and scurried upstairs and out of sight in an instant.

This thing could not be without his special wonder, but the good man, after staring at her retreating figure and for a while surveying the staircase from which she had disappeared, very wisely sought his wife and laid the case before her. Now, if the Reverend Dr. Denis Hay were pitiful and mild, as he assuredly was, his wife was still more tenderly developed for mildness and pity, as became her sex. They could hardly have taken the life of a fly between them if they had egged each other on to bitterness, and the old lady no sooner heard the news than she went soberly after Ophelia and found her, at first with interposing locked door, weeping in her own bedroom.

“My poor dear child,” said the elder lady, taking the younger in her solicitous arms, “whatever is the matter?”

Ophelia looked up at the benevolent, good face she had known from childhood, beaming kindness and sympathy between its silvery bands of hair, and answered of course that it was nothing; but Mrs. Hay was not to be put off in that fashion, and learned in the course of a minute or two that the cause of trouble was Master Frank's disagreement with his father, and his consequent absence in London, and the fear lest the separation between sire and son should be eternal, and a general sense that she, as the *casus belli*, ought to withdraw from her place and make room for souls who panted to be reconciled.

Mrs. Denis Hay preached patience, and preaching it none the worse because, unlike many advocates of that virtue, she practised it, won her cause, and left the girl with her momentary tears assuaged. Then she sought the Rector, who was walking with a troubled air about

the lawn at the back of the Rectory, out of sight of Ophelia's windows, which looked towards the front.

"Ophelia," said Mrs. Hay, "is grieving about the quarrel between Frank and Mr. Boyer. I have told her that it will come all right with time. I hope it may, Denis, and that time may not falsify my words. Could we do anything, do you think? Might I go to Mr. Boyer? He could not very well be rude to me, as he might be to you. I am not at all afraid of him," she added with a smile. "He is not nearly so terrible as people think him. He has a warm temper, certainly," she admitted; "but like all warm-tempered people he has an excellent heart."

"No, no, my dear," said the Rector, not in answer to her estimate either of Marmaduke Boyer or of warm-tempered people in general, but in response to her proposal to visit him. "I think you had best leave that in my hands. I am afraid I have been somewhat remiss in the matter, but I have thought of expediency. I will go and see Boyer at once. I hardly fancy he can be so enraged against me for a simple matter like that poaching affair that he will not listen to reason where his own son is concerned. I will go and see him at once."

He delayed only to secure his hat, his stick, and his gloves, and set out through the misty lanes. The gossamer hung or floated everywhere, for the morning was still young, and the Rector pushed on, making as light of the obstacles before him as if they had been so much of that vague filament, and as easily swept or carried away. Translating himself into Marmaduke Boyer, he saw quite clearly how difficult it was to sustain the present position, and how easy and natural to retire

from it. On the one hand was a dearly beloved only son, and on the other a revered if abnormally hasty parent. Now, what more natural could there be than a reconciliation between the two, if only a friend would take the trouble to start it? A good many years ago the Rector and Mrs. Hay had had a boy of their own, the only fruit of their union, and the Rector's heart was unusually soft and warm within him as he thought of the easy task the peacemaker would have had who sought to bring *him* back to his own flesh and blood after some trumpery temporary possible estrangement.

The Squire was out of doors, earning an appetite for breakfast by a walk about the lawn. He heard the creak and clang of the gate as the Rector entered, but, having no idea that he was going to receive a visit at that hour, forgot the sounds long before Hay's gaunt figure came in sight. When, in the course of his rapid passage to and fro, he turned, he experienced quite a shock at the sight of that once familiar and welcome form, but immediately recovering himself, walked, like the ill-conditioned Briton he was, into the house, and slammed the hall door violently behind him. In this his violence overshot the mark, for it never occurred to the venerable cleric to suppose that any well-bred man could intentionally be so uncivil. He conceived himself not to have been seen, and continued his advance in complete oblivion of the affront which Boyer had intended to put upon him. The Squire, surveying him from the French windows of the identical room in which he and Frank had had their quarrel, could scarce believe his eyes. If any man had shown him as poor a welcome it should have been enough, he declared to himself, to last a lifetime. But these confounded clergy,

with their long-suffering airs ! Hang them for a set of canting, meddlesome prigs and humbugs ! Befriending poachers, and be hanged to them ! instead of supporting justice, and seeing to it that Authority held her sway.

The unconscious Rector rang the bell, and being answered, sent in his name.

"Show him in," said the Squire, in no very amiable tone or mood.

"Good-morning, Boyer," said the Rector, entering, and receiving nothing but a mutilated nod in answer to his salutation, waited until the servant had closed the door behind him.

The man stood outside and listened, and the conversation which ensued was public property before the sun went down.

"I ought to have come here long ago," began the Rector.

"Many men, many minds," said the Squire, balancing himself on the hearth-rug with his hands rammed into his pockets, and his commonplace aspect of obstinacy increased tenfold.

"I am quite willing to admit that I was wrong to interfere in that matter ; but then, you see, I was ignorant of Jonah's history, and his father was so extremely positive. But I did not intend to make excuses. I want, in the first place, to apologize for my mistake, and to ask that we may be friends again. We have been friends for a good many years, Boyer, and it is always a pity for men who have known each other, and liked each other, to quarrel."

"I am not a quarrelsome man," said Boyer. "But you stepped in between a notorious scoundrel and his deserts. A rascal who has been robbing my preserves

ever since he was the height of my trousers pocket. I took your interference ill, and I had a right to take it ill."

"I have no doubt I was wrong," said the Rector. "I know I was wrong, but I was wrong by accident. I am very sorry for my error."

"Well," said the other, somewhat shamefaced, "say no more about it."

"Thank you!" cried the Rector delightedly. He advanced with outstretched hand, and the Squire perforce had to offer his own palm. No grip went with it; but the parson was hearty enough for two, and did not at the moment miss the answering pressure. He thought about it afterwards, and came to the conclusion that he had been precipitate. It was his habit to be precipitate in thinking well of others. "I might have known all along that I had nothing to do but to bring my apology. I owe you another for having put it off so long."

"Say no more about it," said the Squire, and for the first time the chilliness of his tone struck upon the clergyman's ear.

He found an instant justification for it in the concealed sweetness of the Squire's nature. Boyer could not pardon gracefully, but that was because he felt deeply, and did not care to reveal his feeling.

"Englishman-like," thought Dr. Hay, who rather prided himself on his judgment of character. "Really," he said aloud, "I ought to have come before, and to have done you the justice to believe that you would not be rancorous with an old friend over a blunder of that sort." It was plain that he had never risen to a knowledge of the enormity of his own offence in Boyer's eyes. "Better late than never, however," he added, rubbing his hands. "Better late than never."

In the presence of this simple geniality it was impossible to be openly offensive. The Squire was more than nine-tenths ashamed of himself, but that was a sensation which was hard to endure. His usual remedy in such a case was to fly into a passion, and to justify himself to himself with violence. Afterwards, if the other man chose to pocket the affront, and to say no more about it, he himself was always willing to forget; but knowing, as he did here, that he owed more apologies than were due to him, and being interiorly a just man whatever he might have been on the outside (having a conscience, that is to say), and yet being utterly unwilling to pay his debts in this regard, he was far from being happy or at ease. It is probable that he saw his way ahead and reserved the explosion of his forces until he could seem to himself to have a reason for it. Dr. Hay had said that in the first place he wished to apologize. The phrase implied that there was more to come, and he guessed beforehand that it would relate to Frank. There, at least, he would be free to resent interference.

“And now that we are friends again,” began the simple-minded one, but broke off short to laud the Squire’s good-nature. “I knew we should be. I knew I could rely on your sound heart, Boyer, and now that I come to think of it, I am ashamed not to have come to you before and thrown myself upon your kindness.” If things had not gone quite so far, and if what the Rector had in mind was a virtual acknowledgment that he, Marmaduke Boyer, had acted like a fool, he would in all likelihood have yielded here. But the expected provocation came as he had almost known it would. “I should not have come now,” Dr. Hay went on, smiling with his characteristically gentle humor,

“if it had not been for a little domestic incident at the Rectory this morning. We elderly people, of course, are superior to that kind of feeling, but we can remember, eh, Boyer? The fact is that Ophelia is troubling herself quite sadly about Frank. It was all my stupid fault that anything ever came in between the young people at all, and now you and I might lay our heads together and put things straight for them. It’s not a matter,” he added, looking out of the window and still smiling, “it’s not a matter which will need any profound contrivance, I fancy.”

“You may arrange your own affairs how you will, Dr. Hay,” returned the Squire, and at the tone and words the Rector turned in dismayed astonishment. Everything was going so smoothly. It had looked as if the old saw which Shakespeare made or quoted were going to fulfil itself, as if naught should go ill, and Jack should have Jill, and the man should have his mare again, and all should go well. The very words were in the happy, unconscious Rector’s mind, and he was making ready to quote them with a humorous beforehand enjoyment. And then — “You may arrange your own affairs how you will, Dr. Hay,” said the Squire; “but I claim, if you please, to arrange my own.”

“Certainly, my dear Boyer, certainly,” cried the Rector. “By all means; by all means.”

“I don’t disguise from you, Dr. Hay,” said Boyer, “that I think ill of your meddling in matters that don’t concern you. I take leave to tell you, sir” — he was often inclined to be Parliamentary in his form at the beginning of an address of this sort, though he could grow unparliamentary later on — “I take leave to tell

you that I think ill of the manner in which you have taken upon yourself to conduct the church service at the parish church. I take leave to tell you, sir" — growing louder and louder, and taking wider leave as he went on — "that I don't want any of your damned interference in my affairs, sir, and that I won't have it, and that the oftener you come here the more you will be welcome to stay away. You'd like your niece to make a match and get her off your hands, no doubt, and so far as I'm concerned you're welcome to do what you please. As for Frank, he's no son of mine, and for all I care he may go to the ——"

"Boyer," cried the Rector, in a stricken voice, "you can't mean it."

"I can, and I do," roared Boyer. "Now go and cant about the village, and set folks' minds against me — if you can. But mind this — you've misappropriated Crown funds already, and you're going to suffer for it. Where I fasten I stick, sir, and I've fastened there. I'll have things honest, square, and above-board in my own parish, if I die for it."

With that he marched from the room in a towering rage, and the listening servant, happily for himself, hearing his voice nearing, fled without noise down the carpeted hall, though he still heard his employer's last angry syllable.

The Squire slammed the door, and the astonished Rector stood alone.

"The Treasure Trove" was his first thought. "I am a born blunderer, but surely there is nothing wrong in that."

CHAPTER IX.

THE fugitive Joseph, bent upon despair, and resolute to throw his life away, was yet inclined to do things decently and in order, and made a point of enlisting in the Household Brigade. For this his height of five feet eleven qualified him admirably. He was marked as of "superior education" in the schedule of his faculties drawn up for the edification of the authorities at the Horse Guards; and his harmless and tractable ways with his superiors, combined with a sort of fading swagger of *Eve-lies-a-bleeding*, which he wore outside amongst his barrack-room companions and the barmaids of their acquaintance, secured him a certain consideration.

In Thorbury people spoke of him with bated breath. It is a tribute to the wisdom of our rulers that when a young man resolves on entering the army through the ranks, he is universally supposed to have gone quite desperate and reckless, and to have proclaimed himself a wastrel. Young men in Thorbury, whose fathers went early to bed, and insisted that all members of their households should do likewise — young men who were ungenerously limited as to pocket-money — young men whose sweethearts were obdurate, or who found the sweethearts' relatives unamenable — young men who were in distress of any sort, who were in debt or were bitter of soul — threatened to follow Joseph's terrible example.

The most contradictory sentiments reigned in the village with respect to the churchwarden, his father. With some he stood for the personification of all heartlessness, some thought he played the Roman nobly. Isaac, neither knowing nor caring what others thought, went his own pig-headed way in silence, but troubled himself more than anybody would have fancied. His son's enlistment was a lasting shame, as any rustic father would have felt it to be.

Joseph, being dismissed his drill, and allowed to parade the streets in uniform, availed himself of that liberty with a blending of doleful pride and sombre resignation. He characterized his uniform, to himself, as "the livery of his doggeradation." A South Staffordshire man of Joseph's time liked to get as many syllables as possible into a long word, just as he loved to have liberal folds and wrinkles in his Sunday coat. But, the degradation notwithstanding, Joseph when alone would thrust out his chest and draw in the small of his back, and square his elbows in imitation of the more dashing of his comrades; and though he was undoubtedly gloomy at times, life had its compensations for him, as it has for the rest of us.

He was in Hyde Park one afternoon, lank and trim, with his stock half choking him, and, as he swaggered, with his feet wide asunder, lest his spurs should tear his tight-strapped trousers, he was suddenly aware of the Prince of Thorbury, Mr. Frank Boyer, who stopped stock-still on beholding him, and, after one astonished stare, burst into friendly laughter, and thrust out a gloved right hand in greeting. Joseph touched his forage cap with the short cane he carried, and then stood at ease, blushing and grinning, in a compound of shame and pride and pleasure.

"Shake hands, man," said Frank; and Joseph obeyed the order. "So this is what you've done with yourself, is it?"

"Yes, Mr. Frank," returned Joseph, suddenly solemn as the grave, "this is what we've come to, sir."

"Well," said Frank, "no such bad business, either. You seem to thrive on it. Upon my word, they've set you up uncommonly well, Joe. They've actually pulled you out an inch or two. You're as straight as an arrow."

"Oh, it's a healthy life, Mr. Frank," Joseph responded, "and it's capital exercise. There's no denying that; and it makes a man of a man, no doubt; but it isn't the career I should advise anybody to take, sir."

"Joe," said the young Squire, "you are an integral part of a mighty force — a force which has made itself known and feared the wide world over."

"I know I am, sir," said Joseph; "and I could find it in my heart to wish I wasn't." He shook his head with a world of meaning. "I wouldn't have the folks at home fancy I felt like that, Mr. Frank — not for the world. I can tell you, because, if you'll allow the word to pass, we've always been good friends, and I know that what I say goes no further; but I shouldn't like the folks at home to know it. I shouldn't like father to know it."

"I understand. He won't know it from me, you may be sure. He and I are not very good friends just now, I'm sorry to say."

"I'm afraid he's not the man, Mr. Frank, to be good friends with anybody. He's got feelings, I dare say. It's a saying that everybody's got his feelings, and the

heart knoweth its own bitterness; but if father's got any, he's cleverer than most at hiding 'em. He never showed me any, not even when I was no higher than that. It used to be 'Take your shirt off, Joseph, and go into the brew'us,' as regular as clock-work, Mr. Frank, whenever there was any sort of a dispute between us. My bare back and his stick's been made acquainted a thousand times. It's all very well to discipline children, but I shouldn't have liked father the worse for it if he'd let me off now and then. And when you come to think of it, Mr. Frank," he added, with a mild reflectiveness, "a kid *can't* be so blooming wicked that he really wants licking every day of his life. If he could be, it's my opinion there'd be no good in licking him."

"There's a good deal in that, Joe," Frank assented. "But you'll remember it when you have children of your own, you know, and they'll have all the better times because your own times were a bit harder than they need have been."

"I shall never have any children," returned Joseph. "I've seen the married women in quarters, and perhaps you haven't, Mr. Frank. I shouldn't care to marry a woman who'd been used to that kind of life, and the man who'd bring a nice girl into it, why, he'd want kicking. Kicking wouldn't meet the case, sir. Boiling wouldn't be too bad for him."

"Come, Joe!" said the young Squire, "there's a heart beneath that scarlet jacket. You haven't forgotten —"

The life-guardsman blushed, so that his blue eyes and close-cropped flaxen hair went quite colorless by comparison with his complexion.

"I shall be obliged, Mr. Frank," he answered, "if you'll leave that alone. All that is buried in the past, sir. That's what's the matter with it. It's buried in the past."

"That's all very well, my dear Joe," answered Mr. Frank, who could see plainly enough that Joseph was less unwilling to pursue the theme than he pretended to be. "That's all very well. But Susannah isn't buried in the past, you know, and, judging from her walk and her complexion, isn't likely to be buried in the past this fifty years to come. You've got her to think about. Eh? You're not going to stop where you are. Naturally, a stout-hearted, capable young fellow like you is going to put his shoulder to the wheel and get the cart along somehow."

"No, sir," said Joseph, with sombre brow. "It's all over, Mr. Frank. I'm done for."

"Rubbish!" said Frank genially. "You know better! And you haven't got only yourself to think of. There's the young lady down at Thorbury, in all likelihood crying her eyes out, whilst you're swaggering around killing the girls in the London parks. Come and talk with me when you get leave next time. There's my card. We'll have a chat together, Joe, and make up our minds as to what is to be done."

"Thank you, Mr. Frank," said Joseph more gloomily than ever. "It's like your goodness, I'm sure, but it's no use troubling you with *my* affairs. I'm done for. I've chose, sir, and I must abide by it."

"We'll talk more about that," cried the young gentleman. "Life's a long business at our time of life, Joe, and things are not over yet. Come and see me as soon as you can. Good-by for the time being. I'm a little late for an appointment already."

He went away with a friendly flourish of the hand, and Joseph, not altogether displeased to have been seen by one or two of his comrades in conversation with a person of Mr. Frank's figure, continued his aimless afternoon ramble. It was not easy to see how Mr. Frank was going to be of service to him, or how anybody or anything was going ever to be of use to him any more. Perhaps the iron had not as yet entered Joseph's soul very deeply. It is possible that if it had he would have taken less pleasure in the belief that he was utterly and completely done for, that he was a social castaway, a waif, who could be picked up and brought back to port by no miraculous vessel. In that sentiment up to the present moment he took a gloomy and unfeigned pride. There was, in the barrack library, a work, of which I have forgotten the title and even the author's name; but which may still, perhaps, be remembered for its uncompromising presentment of one fact.

"The *personnel* of the British Army," said the writer, "is made up of the failures of civil life." Joseph had read this pleasing tome, and had found it (as every young recruit who has come across it must have done) infinitely soothing and helpful. It speaks well for the Military Authority who has the selection of books for barrack libraries, that he should be careful to keep up the self-love and *esprit de corps* of the troops by presenting them with printed reflections so inspiring and useful.

Once or twice, later on, when the rules of the service allowed him to air his long legs and straight back in the public thoroughfares, Joseph had thoughts of hunting out Mr. Frank, and at least enjoying the mournful satisfaction of proving to that well-meaning and friendly

young gentleman that his (Joseph's) case was hopeless ; but whether he were withheld by shyness or shame or pride, or a compound of the three, he never paid the contemplated visit, and a month or two rolled on without bringing to pass any further meeting between the two.

In the end, it was Frank who sought out Joseph, and found him in his shirt-sleeves, burnishing a helmet with a little bit of pointed stick and a pinch of Bath-brick powder. Joseph, pipe in mouth, sat upon the iron frame of his bedstead, not far removed from the fire, and worked idly and thoughtfully, poking his little bit of pointed stick into the metal interstices of the bottle-hat, and pausing often. On a bench before him sat a gayly dressed young man of about his own age, a little London dandy of the lower rank, who wore a quantity of gilded base metal in the way of jewelry. This gentleman's long hair came into contact with his coat collar, and had left there signs of its owner's use of those essenced oils with which it was once the mode for men of fashion to anoint their locks. His linen and his fingernails were, perhaps, a little dubious, but there could be no doubt about the owner's apprehension of himself or of his own splendors. A tasselled cane, the well-conserved stump of a cigar, and a single glove, unworn, but dingy with service, occupied his attention by turns, and each afforded opportunity for the display of such graces as are only to be acquired by residence in a capital.

Frank entered the room unannounced — a shirt-sleeved warrior at the foot of the stairs had directed him — and, advancing unnoticed, clapped Joseph on the shoulder. The doleful young guardsman, turning at this, arose, and shook hands respectfully.

"I don't know if you remember Corney Badger, Mr. Frank," he said, waving a hand towards the young gentleman of the locks and the jewelry. "He's kind enough to come and see me sometimes. He's a Thorbury man, though perhaps you mayn't recall him."

Frank had to confess that Mr. Badger had escaped his recollection. He remembered the boy, but would without aid have failed to identify the man, who was some half-dozen years his elder, and had been out of Thorbury apprenticed to a London dry-goods-man, this score of years ago.

"We came across each other quite by chance," said Joseph, whose mournfulness had taken a very deep tinge indeed. "He was good enough to claim me, and he's good enough at times to come and sit with me, and to exchange the time of day. Have you had any news from the Chase, Mr. Frank? I don't know whether I'm right in asking or not, but I hope the Squire's quite well."

These inquiries and Frank's replies to them enlightening Mr. Badger as to the new-comer's identity, that gentleman drew in his legs to allow him to pass, and indeed seemed to draw in at all points, and to diminish alike in size and radiance. For to all Thorbury-bred shopboys, even though they had been emancipated from the territorial influences for years, the name of Boyer came as a name of power, and the Chase was a residence of splendor, the like of which could hardly be found in the world elsewhere.

"I remember your respected father, sir," said Mr. Badger, screwing his features into an expression of tenderest interest. "I hope he keeps his 'ealth, sir."

Frank had not taken any great liking to this new ac-

quaintance, and was perhaps a little haughty with him. Mr. Badger was one of those gentlemen whose manner appears to invite signs of haughtiness from their social superiors, and who would really appear to enjoy being snubbed and despitefully treated. He was alternately fawning and familiar, and on the strength of his long residence in town had adopted an accent in which the most charming of the peculiarities of Cockaigne mingled delightfully with a lingering remnant of his native drawl of Thorbury.

"I haven't been down there now," said Mr. Badger, gnawing the head of his cheap stick, and taking an introspective look — "I haven't been down there now, not for, I should think, nine 'ear. I suppose it's of no use denying as it's slow down there — is it, sir? But I'm going to take a run down to see an old aunt of mine in the neighborhood. If I could be of service to *you*, sir" —

Frank professed that he was greatly obliged, but could not see in what manner he could avail himself of Mr. Badger's kind proffer.

"Anything I *could* do, sir," said Badger, "I am sure I should be delighted."

"When you can give me a quiet minute, Joe," said Frank, ignoring this flourish of politeness, "I should like to have a serious talk with you. I have something of importance to say to you."

"Perhaps," suggested Joseph, "Mr. Badger wouldn't mind walking over to the canteen. There are two or three men he knows who'll most likely be there at this time."

Mr. Badger accepted this invitation to withdraw, and shook hands with the young Squire, who felt clammy

and uncomfortable after this salute, and would fain have washed his hands at once. It is a thing for which no humane man can be anything but thankful that the people who inspire these feelings are ignorant of the fact. It is, perhaps, not a thing to be thankful for that they are generally amongst the most self-satisfied of men, and are convinced that their neighbors think as highly of them as they do of themselves. Mr. Badger, in the pleased conviction that he had rather fascinated the young Squire than otherwise, took his way to the canteen. Young Mr. Boyer would have noticed beyond a doubt the polish the Thorbury metal could take when it chanced to be carried to London. There was no touch of the yokel about Corney Badger, C. B. was pleased to believe. The contrast between himself and Joseph could hardly fail to make itself observed.

“Now, Joe,” said Frank, when he found himself alone with his *pays*, “you wouldn’t come to see me, and so I’ve been obliged to come and see you. Haven’t you had about enough of this?”

“I don’t know, sir,” returned Joseph. “I’m getting used to it, I dare say, sir. I don’t feel it as I did at first. It’s a lazy sort of life and a useless sort of life at present, and I could wish that I’d chose another corps. There’s all the fighting stuff of the army wanted just now, Mr. Frank, and all we great big hulking chaps are stopping at home. That’s hard lines, rather, ain’t it? The boys call after us in the streets, ‘Feather-bed soldiers!’ That’s rather a queer imitation of feathers,” he added, turning round with a laugh, and punching the coarse ticking of his neatly rolled straw mattress, “but it’s pretty easy to see how folks think and feel about the Guards, sir. We’re good to sit on our big

black chargers and be stared at, and to spend our time over Warren's blacking, and pipeclay, and chrome yellow, and a chain burnish, but that's all we're good for. We're meant for ornament, we are, and I think as a body that we're ornamental, Mr. Frank; but that isn't what a man was made for, not if he feels himself to be a man at all. There is a bit of talk now and again about our being sent out as well, but that'll end in talk. Some of the chaps are just wild about it, but for my part I've got no hopes of any such thing happening."

"That being the case," said Frank, "you can't have much objection to my proposal."

"And what might that be?"

There was a kind of respectful beforehand defiance in Joseph's manner which put the young gentleman upon his guard and his mettle at the same time.

"Now, Joe," said he, laying a hand on the other's shoulder; "to begin with, we're not going to have any sort of nonsense between you and me. We can say things to each other that people who haven't known each other all their lives can't say. Now, between ourselves, Joe, you were an ass to enlist at all."

"That's truth," cried Joseph, "if truth never was to be spoke again in the world."

"Very good," said Frank. "Now, any man may be an ass by accident, but it's only your real donkey who keeps on being an ass in spite of his experience. You're not going to the Crimea—you've quite made up your mind to that fact—and you're dead sick of this present do-nothing business. Very well. Apply for your discharge at once. I'll find the money, and—do hold your tongue for a minute, there's a good fellow!—I've been talking to a man I know who has business in the

City, and telling him about you, and your habits, and what you can do and all that — and he can find a place for you.”

“No,” said Joseph, laying down the bottle-hat and rising very decidedly. “No, Mr. Frank. It’s very kind of you, sir, and if there was nothing moving I’d take your offer as kindly as it’s meant. But though *I* don’t believe we’re going to fight, there’s them as do, and I won’t leave while anybody thinks there’s a chance of it. There’s nobody sicker of an army career than me, I do assure you, Mr. Frank, and as for the Roosians, why should *I* bear ’em any malice? I never so much as set eyes on one so far as I know. I don’t want to fight, and I won’t pretend I do, though there’s some that goes a-swaggering and would make a man believe they loved blood like gravy. But I won’t leave the corps, sir, not while any man thinks there’s a chance of our being called on. Not as I think they’d let me go, neither, to be quite plain with you, but whether they would or not, I won’t try. Many thanks to you all the same, sir, and I couldn’t be more obliged not if I took your kindness a dozen times over.”

Now, at this very instant there was a sudden roar of a cheer in the room below, and a scattered roar in the square like a scattered fire. Then a noise of windows slamming up and doors violently thrown open, and then more cheers. Then on a sudden the door of the room in which Frank and his fellow-villager stood together was burst open, and half a dozen guardsmen rushed in, with Mr. Corney Badger at their head.

“Stringer, old chap!” shouted Mr. Badger, waving his tasselled cane wildly. “The Guards has got the rowt. You chaps is bound for the Crimea.”

CHAPTER X.

BUT our story is of Thorbury, and whatever happens to those people who have quitted it is not of the least consequence to us except it acts upon those who are left behind. The excitement in London barracks, and the wild cheers of London mobs as the gallant fellows, who had never as yet drawn a sword in anger, march through the streets on the way to war — these things are outside our chronicle. Like the master of all story-tellers, under similar conditions, we stay at home with the non-combatants.

Mr. Corney Badger, then, was the bearer of the only authentic tidings of Joe Stringer which had yet reached Thorbury since the young man's departure from it. Joseph had promised to write to little Mary, and would have kept his promise beyond a doubt if it had not been for a variety of intervening circumstances and emotions. He was supported by pride and anger when he went away, and he made the promise under their influence. But when he had taken the sergeant's shilling, he was not disposed immediately to send home the news. He put it off somehow for a more convenient season, and, being more and more disgusted and lonely and down-hearted about his own fate, — the mealy-hearted Joseph, — he wound up by not writing at all. Only when the news of war came his seeming indifference melted, and by the secret hand of Mr. Badger he sent down memorials to his sister for transmission to a young lady named

Susannah, with whom the reader has not yet made personal acquaintance, but who may still adorn these pages by her presence. Joseph sent off by the post a letter to his father, in which he said very little of his own hopes or fears, but enough to frighten that hard old man considerably.

MY DEAR FATHER, — As you are no doubt aware from the newspapers, the Household Brigade is going out to the Crimea. I joined on the day I left home, and I am going out with them, having passed my drill five months ago. It may happen that I shall never come back, though I shall hope different; but if not, there is no bad blood on my side. **X** That is all I write to tell you; and I am, my dear father, your affectionate son,

JOSEPH.

There was a big black **X** with a line drawn from it, leading from the last full stop but one to the opposite page, and there the writer had added:

“Whether I come back or no, there is no bad blood on my side, and never was nor will be.” Then followed: “I do not think” — but this had a line through it, and Joseph had evidently determined to keep what he did not think to himself. He had been on the point of saying that, in his opinion, Isaac had not acted wisely towards him; but where was the good of embittering controversy? If he fell, the mistaken parent would suffer; and Joseph felt a consolation in the thought. When he was gone, his obscured excellences would be cleared, and would shine brighter than they had ever had a chance to do before. It was very evident that when this condition of things came about it would not be possible for Joseph to extract much comfort from it. Whatever joys it yielded must be had in

prospect, and even there he found the comfort cold at times.

In his letter to little Mary he had opened up his heart more fully, but if anybody had wanted to see the real interior Joseph at that time, he would have had to read his letter to his sweetheart. He might have come to the conclusion that it was a rather incoherent Joseph, who was not very sure of his own mind, divided between the desire to die and be forgotten, and the desire to live and be gloriously remembered; and prophesying on the one hand a neglected grave in an unknown country, and on the other a splendid return from war, drums beating and colors flying. The truth is that these contradictions presented the only possible portrait of the young man who was going away; and it is very likely that they would have served to express the inward and spiritual features of a good many of his comrades.

Cornelius Badger, making his easy way to Thorbury to revisit old friends, and to dazzle such as were unfamiliar with metropolitan splendors, reached the village twelve hours after Joseph's letter had been delivered by the postman. Little Mary had taken in the letter at the door, and, with a beating heart, had set it beside her father's plate at the breakfast-table. Ironside Isaac, seeing it lie there, had put up his glasses to look at it, and, having recognized his son's handwriting, had restored the spectacles to their case without a word or a sign that Mary could read. He ate with no diminution of his ordinary appetite, and when the meal was over, he took the letter away with him. He read its few lines in solitude, and they had far more effect upon him than the average spectator beholding him could have guessed. The dimly formed idea of months ago that he might

have been more reasonable with Joseph had come to be something like a creed with him. He liked the lad in his independence and rebellion better than ever he had liked him in the days of his submission. Where this old man could tyrannize, in fact, it came natural to him to despise, and the slave who refused to submit to his dominion became naturally and immediately respectable.

All this had nothing to do with any possible reconciliation. He was not going to own himself in the wrong — to humiliate himself before his own flesh and blood. He would rather have died than have owned that he was anything but wise and just. Something within himself whispered an accusation, and he made but few defences. But to another like himself he would have denied them with all the energies of his soul.

He went about alone a good deal on the day of the letter's arrival, musing on its contents. His heart smote him to think that Joseph might come back no more. There were many mourning families in England in those days, as middle-aged readers will well remember. Women in black were a common spectacle in all ranks of life, and in any crowd the men who wore black hat-bands were conspicuous by their numbers. It angered the old man that Joseph forgave him. What right had the runaway young rascal to say that there was no ill blood on his side? He tried hard to shelter himself behind that breastwork; but where is the good of any breastwork when your foeman is within? What avail walls of strength if you yourself will open the gates, and let the enemy sneak in one at a time?

His meditations lasted him all day, and kept him more than usually silent at the dinner, tea, and supper

table, and even carried him forth at night into the field behind his own house, where he paced to and fro, smoking his evening pipe in strange disquiet.

Whilst he was thus occupied, he thought he saw a gliding, stooping figure in the darkness, and, crouching down beside a neighbor's garden wall lest his own head should be visible against the sky, he watched and listened. A moment's watchfulness assured him that his suspicions were not without foundation. Somebody was prowling at the rear of his own premises, and a low and guarded whistle seemed to indicate that a signal had been arranged. The prowler, pulling himself up by both hands, revealed a chimney-pot hat and an indeterminate profile showing faintly against the night sky, which was gray with scudding cloud. Even in these little favorable circumstances Isaac thought he could have recognized any Thorbury man. The district round about was nowhere very thickly populated, and he knew everybody for miles. The man in the chimney-pot hat was a stranger, and Isaac, with suspicious fancies rising fast against the servant-maid, stalked the shadowy figure, keeping well within the sheltering darkness of the wall as he advanced. In the course of a mere moment or two he came within pouncing distance of the intruder, and, making a sudden dash at him, secured him by the arm.

"Hillo!" said the captive in a cockney sounding voice. "What are *you* up to?"

"What are *you* up to?" Isaac demanded in turn. "You come along o' me, young man. Let me have a look at you."

The captive was no other than Mr. Corney Badger, who, having had secrecy impressed upon him, had taken

this lurking way to it, and had thus brought suspicion upon himself. He had argued — out of his own experience, it may be — that a furtive whistle at the back door might not go unnoticed by the domestic servant, and from her to her young mistress had seemed an easy step.

“You can have as long a look at me as you want to have, governor,” he responded soothingly. “You needn’t hold on quite as tight as that, unless you like to.”

How should he explain his presence there? How pretend business of any sort?

Stringer, meanwhile, had haled him through the doorway which led from his own back garden to the outer fields, and, having locked the door and pocketed the key, marched him briskly towards the house.

“Here! Take it easy, governor,” cried Mr. Badger, who, above all things, wanted time to think. “You needn’t tear a gentleman’s coat-sleeve out at the armpit. No, sir, really. I’m a-coming quiet, ain’t I? Take it easy, then.”

Beyond the garden lay a paved yard, a patch of which was feebly illuminated by the candle-light which shone through the kitchen window. Here Isaac brought his man up sharply, and, swinging him round so that he faced the light, stared at him in angry inquiry.

“Why, bless me!” cried Mr. Badger, in pretended surprise; “it’s Mr. Stringer! How do you do, sir? I wondered if I’d made any mistake with regards to the ’ouse, after having been away for so long a period of time, sir.” He had his excuses ready now, and was confident that they were irreproachably complete. “I only got down from town this evening, Mr. Stringer,

and I thought I'd just come round and give Joseph a call without disturbing the rest of you so late in the evening."

"Who are you?" asked Isaac.

"Who am I? Why, I'm Corney Badger. You ought to know me, Mr. Stringer. My mother was a tenant of yours for many 'ears. You see, Mr. Stringer, I'm used to latish hours myself. You get into that way in London, comparatively speaking. I wasn't quite sure that you mightn't have gone to bed, and, of course, I shouldn't have dreamed of disturbing anybody. Is Joseph at home, Mr. Stringer?"

"No, sir," said Isaac, who having suffered his hold to grow more and more lax, had at length let it go altogether. "Joseph is not at home. I don't remember as ever you was that intimate with him as you could come and whistle for him when you wanted him. It's years since you was down here, and Joseph was no more than a child at the time. That cock won't fight, Mr. Badger."

"I've got a message for him," said the mendacious Corney, and straightway he concocted a little story of a Barfield youth with whom Joseph had been familiar, and who had since gone to London. The two young fellows had had many things in common, and the invention of the message was the simplest thing in the world.

"You can spare yourself the trouble of bringin' any messages here," growled Isaac, who was too proud to let any man tell the tale before him if he could help it. "My son has seen fit to leave my house, an' where he is I nayther know nor care. He's gone a-sojerin' seemin'ly, for I got some sort of a scrawl from him this mornin', but I don't look to hear any moor on him, and

I'd just as soon have the room of his companions as their company. I'll take leave to see you off my premises, young man."

"I'll call and pay my respects in the morning, Mr. Stringer," said Corney, keeping in mind the packet he had promised secretly to deliver to Mary.

"You can save yourself the trouble," returned Isaac. "I bean't anxious to mend acquaintance with you."

There was a candor about this which was difficult to misinterpret, and Mr. Badger went his way in some perplexity as to the manner in which he should discharge his engagement to his friend. It did not weigh very heavily with him on the morrow, and, as a matter of fact, it might have been forgotten altogether, if it had not happened that he went to church on Sunday morning, and there made out that Joseph's sister was, to his way of thinking, an uncommonly pretty girl. Cornelius was a professional lady-killer, and was got up especially to do execution amongst the village fair that morning. Poor little Mary, finding herself regarded by the dubious buck from London, blushed a good deal, and was somewhat alarmed by him. She thought he looked very noble and handsome, and if Cornelius had only known her thoughts of him he would have been flattered indeed. A good few of the male members of the congregation could have found it in their hearts to boot Cornelius. He took insufferable airs, sticking his dirtily gloved hand into his open waistcoat, and ogling the ceiling in a musical rapture whilst the Psalms were sung — sweeping that same dirty glove through his essenced locks with a Tappertit complacency. Cornelius was snub-nosed, and, though he was far ahead of his time, and wore a chin-tuft, he was really far less

majestic of presence than he thought himself. The Squire and St. Sauveur were tickled by him, each in his own way enjoying the new-comer's graces and shabby splendors. The Rector had some ado not to smile at him. Not often does so very cheap a Lara, Manfred, Don Juan bless any British village with his presence. But the girl thought him quite beautiful and noble and romantic, and when his cunning little orbs languished at the ceiling she was certain he had a sorrow somewhere. He was like — he was like — her reading had not been very extensive, but she wanted a hero to whom to resemble him. He was the very first person of his sex who had made an impression on that young heart — which turned out to be a little too impressionable when the conqueror came. Perhaps it is often so. The virgin citadel strikes its flag, not only without a blow struck in self-defence, but without ever having been summoned to surrender. The conqueror rides by without asking to take possession, and the citadel's occupant is left lonely and grieving.

Cornelius, though willing enough to believe in his good fortune with the ladies in a general way, was less than half conscious of the impression he had made. The letter he had in charge for little Mary helped him to an aspect of secrecy burning for communion. In that rank of life, and at that time of day, a young gentleman of experience in the world thought next to nothing of winking at a young lady, and by gesture inviting her to private conference. Corney naturally tried all his graces, all his arts of persuasion, but Mary, though she saw them, and though her unpractised heart beat high, hung out of reach, and would not come for his calling.

He was at church again in the evening, quite contrary to his usual practice, and Mary stole sly glances about the place until she had discovered his whereabouts. There was no mistake at all about it. The mysterious elegant stranger in the long hair and the gloves was making eyes at her, and was posing for her benefit. Was it unnatural for the trembling little village maiden to ask herself, in a doubting, heart-shaken wonder and triumph, if she had made a conquest? We are all mortal, and many of us are foolish.

The matter got to seem beyond a doubt when day by day the Elegant strolled past Isaac's house with repeated glances at the windows. Whenever he caught sight of Mary he made veiled signs to her, and on one or two occasions, when he was quite sure that nobody else observed him, he took Joseph's missive from his pocket and held it so that it could be seen by the blushing young lady who peered from behind the window-curtains. Is it needful to say that the blushing young lady spent a good deal of her time in the neighborhood of those window curtains, or that she watched for the conqueror's presence? Her silly heart told her that the letter contained a declaration, and Cornelius Badger grew handsomer, nobler, and more interesting day by day. Mary knew his name by this time, and thought Cornelius the dearest title in the world. What a charming name, to be sure! Cornelius. It was like him somehow, and suited him. Not even love's dawning dream could romanticize Badger over-much, but Cornelius — the owner of the name and not the name itself — could ennoble any appellation.

It was very evident that so long as Mary chose that the letter should not be delivered, Corney could find no

opportunity of handing it over to her. It was she who must make the chance — the young man could do no more than make signs that he wanted the chance made for him. So, after two or three days of coy denial, the citadel capitulated in form. Mr. Badger had gone languishing by with his glance on the window-panes of the room he now recognized as Mary's. He had shown the letter, and had looked with the most agonizing appeal right in the eyes of the young lady.

When he had gone by ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, she put on her bonnet and shawl and stole into the street, with such burning cheeks and sparkling eyes that she was ashamed and afraid to be seen. Her heart beat beneath her bodice with such a rat-tat of an alarum as had never sounded there before, and her breath was troubled and uneven. Surely she was doing nothing wrong, and yet she felt unutterably guilty. She dropped her veil, and had much ado to walk as if she was bent upon a common enterprise. Oh! if everybody, if anybody could read her secret!

Reynolds's Miscellany of this period had the most thrilling stories of love and adventure. The wickedest lords and the most enchanting pickpockets lived in its brilliant pages, and within the last day or two, Mary, going over the store of back numbers in the possession of an old schoolfellow of hers, had come to the conclusion that Cornelius rather resembled the great George Barrington, the most exquisite cut-purse, a gentleman of such finished manners that he picked pockets and stole jewelry at a Court ball. She was sure that Mr. Badger was naughty — in a perfectly harmless and romantic way, of course. She had no suspicion that he picked pockets. She knew very well by this time that

he earned a respectable living in London employment, but she must needs put some sort of halo about him, and this was the only one she could find to her hand. Fashions in dress, fashions in speech, and fashions in literature used to descend from one class to another in a much more marked degree than now. The country vulgar talked of "tay" and "chaney" a hundred years after the town fashionables had done with those pronunciations. The romantic hero marked with one virtue and a thousand crimes lingered in the literature of the poor years and years after the modern masters had driven him from the stage before which we burn incense to culture. To get a Cornelius out of the commonplace at all, he *had* to be wicked.

Here was the country road with not a soul in sight, and little Mary getting a trifle frightened and low-spirited. What if he had shown that letter for the last time, and had made up his mind to waste his time no further? What if he were marching at this moment direct for Castle Barfield town with intent to take coach and train, and so back to London for good and all? The dreams had not been dreamed for long, but even dream-flowers can take root. Jack's beanstalk was of that sort most likely, and every one knows to what a height and at what a pace that wonderful vegetable thrived and prospered. The poor child was ready to cry to think that she had so given herself away for naught, when the young man turned the corner rather more than a hundred yards away. He was smoking a short clay, but even that became him as it could have become nobody else in the world. At first he did not see her, or feigned not to see her, but her knees almost failed beneath her. Little as she was learned in the ways of masculine hum-

bug, she knew well enough that he was aware of her presence long before he meant to bestow a visible regard upon her. He sleeked his innocent chin tuft, caressed his hair, raised his hat that the breeze of heaven might visit his brow, and looked abstracted, as though poetical fancies sailed his inward deeps, and he surveyed them, charmed.

He started as she neared him, and raised his hat with a sweeping salutation.

"I believe," he said, "that I have the honor to address my conversation to Miss Stringer."

Miss Stringer with a half-courtesy — looking a hundredfold more dignified and stand-offish than she felt — admitted that his guess had hit the mark. How delightfully he spoke! how charming was the single simple phrase in which he hailed her! Who, among the youth of Thorbury, could boast such an address?

"That bein' so, Miss," said the fascinating youth, "I am the bearer of secret intelligence. Your brother Joseph, Miss, entrusted this package to my sacred care. There is inclosures within it which, as your brother Joseph give me to hunderstand, was priceless in his eyes, Miss. Will you permit me, Miss, to 'and it over? Thank you. My little mission in Thorbury is now discharged. If you should have any little commission for your brother before I leave, I 'ope to be going back to town in the course of a day or two, and could see as it was forwarded to him. I will now bid you good-afternoon, Miss."

He was gone lingeringly, and she had not the courage or the skill to stop him. A fine lady might have had *savoir faire* enough, but Mary was helpless. He bowed — oh! how he bowed! — and went his way.

Would she ever, ever see him again? She felt wicked, when she came to think of it afterwards. She had privately been disappointed to find that the stranger's packet was no more than a letter from Joseph, and in penitence for that sin she cried that night until her eyes were swollen. Human motives are terribly mixed things, and she dreaded even whilst she cried lest the wicked regret should mingle with the pious repentance. Perhaps it did, but little Mary had by no means seen the last of Mr. Badger, though she bade him farewell with more tears than a much more deserving young man would have been worthy of.

CHAPTER XI.

THE Squire of Thorbury was fully persuaded that he was doing no more and no less than his duty when he rode into Barfield and took advice as to the steps which should be taken to compel the Rector of All Angels to restore the treasure-trove to the Crown. I never knew precisely what legal machinery was set in motion, and I forget whether the good Doctor was or was not plagued with the delivery of documents. He certainly knew of the proceedings actual and pending, and was greatly harassed by them, for the treasure-trove was spent, and if he had exceeded his rights in spending it he would be very much troubled indeed to make good the money.

Of course Marmaduke Boyer was bound to justify himself. He knew by this time that he had been a wrong-headed fool, and the thought that other people were in all likelihood very much of his opinion used almost to madden him. As for ceasing to be a wrong-headed fool and acting like the sensible and good-hearted fellow he knew himself to be at bottom, that was clean out of the question. It would have entailed a confession at the very beginning, and he was not the man to confess that he had ever been wrong in his life, even though that clearance of conscience would have set him in the right way for the rest of his days.

Whatever was a matter of offence to the parson began to be a matter of gratification to him, and by parity of reasoning and feeling whatever pleased Dr. Hay was a

source of displeasure to the Squire. The very signs of the church repairs were a trouble to Boyer. Whilst Messrs. Reinemann and MacWraith had been in the village, and he had sometimes unavoidably encountered them, he had been used to walk or ride by with a scowl, and had so steadfastly refused any answer to their salutations that they had ceased to offer any, and passed with as plain an ill-will as the Squire himself displayed. When those worthies had gone away — their work being completed — Boyer had visited the church, and had inspected the old Bishops' Bible in its renovated condition with a surprising spleen and anger. Over a hundred pounds had been spent upon the work. He harangued everywhere about it — in his own house and abroad. It was a wicked, wanton, wilful waste of money! How much good might not have been done amongst the poor of the village with a like sum? Nobody dared to ask him why he, seeing this so clearly, did not spend such a trifle, and do out of hand the good he desired. He would never have felt the loss of the money, but to tell the truth he was not keen in works of public utility as a rule, and only cared for this because it gave him a chance for a fling at the parson.

Dr. Hay was one of the sweetest-natured men in the world, and he had two or three refuges which Boyer lacked. On both sides the combat was unequal. The Rector would not have hurt a worm, even if the worm had been mischievous. He was so constructed that no greater pain than the knowledge that he himself was the cause of pain could possibly have assailed him. There — as a combatant — the Squire had the distinctest advantage over him, but on the other hand, Denis Hay was so slow to offence and never met offence half-way.

He was a born humorist of the kindly, inexpressive sort — the kind of man who can never suffer bitterly because of his own perfect lack of gall, and he was a practical Christian into the bargain. Insult and misconstruction fell from him as water falls from a duck's back. He pitied the insulter, and more or less saw a droll side to everything. His kindly heart and sunny nature armed him in the full panoply of charity. It was really difficult to hurt him, and nobody but a headstrong donkey like the Squire, or an ignorant bigot like the churchwarden, would have willingly made the attempt. But no man is altogether proof against malice and stupidity, and between the two he was sorely wounded.

Zealous Isaac was watching the repairs in his usual grudging humor on the Monday which came after his first news of his fugitive son. He was more than commonly wrathful at the Rector's heathen doings because he was more than commonly sore and angry with himself. It was a day of cold sunshine and hard wind, and a sandy, mortary grit was flying in the air to the discomfort of anybody who chose to walk in the churchyard. The vestry was half unroofed and one of its windows was out. A great gap in the church wall, where some ancient doorway was to be restored, permitted the eye to wander from the churchyard over a third of the interior of the building, and as Isaac leaned his arms upon the bare stone and mortar of the vestry window-sill, he could see the lectern, with the restored Bishops' Bible, chained in the old fashion, lying upon it. A huge modern quarto lay beside it, and the broad oak desk had room both for the new and the old.

Stringer, careless of his customary broadcloth, lolled with his elbows in the mortar, and shook his shiny silk

hat into all manner of strange angles, his head twitching this way and that as his own dogmatic wrathful spirit pricked him. There was not a thing in view which did not, more or less, disturb and anger him. A score of years later the smell of quicklime was for him the representative odor of the scarlet woman of Babylon.

Whilst he stood grudging and grizzling, Saint Sauveur and the Rector appeared in view, and were seen in conversation with the master-builder, pointing hither and thither, and inspecting this and that, in a dumb show, hateful to Isaac's heart and understanding. They were so disagreeable to him that he must needs get nearer to them. He sauntered through the vestry doorway, brushing the dust and crumbs of mortar from his respectable elbows, and scowling with all his might and main at the Reverend Dr. Hay and his organist, who remained for a time unconscious of him.

"By the way, Denis," said Saint Sauveur, drawing a pocket-book from his breast, "I have something curious to show you. I found it in the *Athenæum* this morning, and cut it out for you." He searched through the various compartments of the book with his long spatulate fingers, and, lighting on the scrap he sought for, smoothed it out on the lectern, and read aloud: "An excellently preserved and complete copy of the Bishops' Bible has been offered to the Imperial Library at Dresden. The price demanded is £800. The example, which is printed on vellum, is said to be a very fine one. Its authenticity is undoubted, and considerable interest attaches to it, on the ground that every vellum-printed copy of the edition of 1568 was supposed to be already known and accounted for."

"Dear me!" said Dr. Hay. "Eight hundred pounds?

So much as that? Dear me!" He was abstracted at the moment, but woke up almost immediately. "Really eight hundred pounds. That is a great deal of money, Ernest. A great deal of money."

With that he came, gauntly stooping, to the lectern, and began to turn over the vellum leaves of the old book, whose huge clasp and padlock lay unused.

"I wonder," said Saint Sauveur, "where that unknown copy came from."

"Ah," replied the Rector. "I wonder."

An illumination of satanic stupidity entered Mr. Isaac Stringer's mind. Dull and stolid as he was he grasped at it.

The two gentlemen remarked his presence almost simultaneously, and one of them gave a little start at seeing him unexpectedly so near. The Rector bade him a courteous good-day, as he did always; but Isaac growled a sort of inarticulate challenge in return for it.

"Him and his good-mornings!" said he a few minutes later, when he was left to himself, and parson and organist were in the windy, sunlit churchyard, but still visible through the open porch. "Him and his good-mornings! I've no patience with them snaky, slimy ways. What's he want to talk to me for, when he knows I hate the sight on him?"

He saw the two off the premises before he allowed himself to give a sign of the thought that was in his mind. Then, when he was quite alone, he went to the lectern, and turned over the leaves of the old book.

"Eight hunderd pound's a lot o' money," he mused. "This is no more like th' old book than I'm like my great-great-grandfather. Lord o' mercy! I reckon as you could buy this for a tenner at any time. This ship-

skin's a bit dearer than paper; but outside that I don't see wheer the differ lies. It's as plain as the nose on a man's face."

He simmered with hate and anger. To a man of his fibre there was nothing so natural and easy as to believe ill of an enemy. The Rector had sold the old book, and had a cheap substitute set in its place. He was convinced of it. He had not the remotest ground for this insane and wicked suspicion, but his hungry malice wanted none. His desire was proof enough.

It would be unfair to forget how much the *odium theologicum* moved him. If *that* were no excuse, how many estimable Christian gentlemen, whose names are cherished by the Churches, would sink to the stature of the meanest hate and spite and envy.

He was so absolutely certain of his ground, that he went off to the Chase at once, and laid the thing before his ally the Squire, as if it had been a matter of proved and certain fact.

"This goes beyond everything, Mr. Boyer. What do you *think* now as that theer cussid Rector of ourn has gone and done at last?"

Isaac told his tale with conviction, and Boyer was half willing to believe. Then a revulsion came.

"Rubbish, Stringer! Rubbish! I should be a scoundrel if I allowed myself to think of such a thing for a moment. Dismiss that mad fancy from your mind, man. He's an infernal, meddlesome, silly old fool, and too fond of sticking his nose into other people's business; but, hang it all, he isn't a daylight robber of the Church he serves. No, no! Hang it all, Stringer!"

"Hast looked at the book, Squire?" asked Isaac; and the Squire was compelled to admit that he had

done nothing of the kind as yet. "Come and look at it. Tell me if the book as lies theer now is hunderds o' years old, as the t'other was known to be. Come and look at it. It's a thing as a child might speak to."

Marmaduke Boyer was not learned in old books, but he knew somewhat more than Isaac, and undertook to disperse his foolish fancy for him. He accepted this task the more readily because he was genuinely ashamed of having for a moment given the suspicion a hearing.

"D'ye see," said Stringer, turning over the leaves. "Do you mean to tell me as this is hunderds and hunderds o' years of age as th'ode book used to be? No, no. Thee knows better than that, Squire. Why, look at it."

"My good fellow," said Boyer, "the book has been restored. What do you suppose a hundred pounds have been spent upon it for, if it was to look now as it looked when it was allowed to tumble all to pieces?"

"If this heer shipskin's any older than I am," said Isaac, gripping a score of the leaves together, "I'll eat it. The parish is a-bein' swindled, Squire."

"Stringer, you're a fool!" cried Boyer.

"That's as may be," returned Isaac, who was in no wise displeased at this open statement of opinion. "But one way or another I'll find a way to put it to the test. There's them as knows, I reckon. I'll find out if it costs me twenty pound."

"You'd better spend your twenty pounds," says Boyer. "The sooner you get that maggot out of your head the better."

"You know more about these things than I do, Squire. What's the way to go about it? I'll do it, ah! if it was to cost me thirty pound."

“It won’t cost you that,” Boyer answered. “I should think an expert would give you his opinion for a ten-pound note at the outside. You’d better save your money,” he added contradictorily.

“I’m all for justice,” said Isaac, and curiously enough he thought he was so. “You tell me wheer I am to get a letter wrote to, and I’ll get that letter wrote, and wrote to-night, without a post’s delay.”

And now, if Messrs. Reinemann and MacWraith *should* have been acting unfairly, all manner of unpleasant consequences loom ahead. The oddest part of the whole business will be that the ignorant guess of an angry blockhead exposes a rascality of which no clever and learned person amongst the blockhead’s neighbors had done so much as dream.

CHAPTER XII.

ISAAC STRINGER walked home from Thorbury Church that day the proud possessor of a torn and used envelope, on the inside surface of which the Squire had, with his own hand, pencilled the address of a famous bookseller and bibliographic expert in Piccadilly, London. He contemplated the half-crumpled and time-soiled paper with a hearty inward satisfaction. The shiny hat on his dogmatic big head indulged in a perfect series of gymnastics as, in his mental excitement, he shook and re-shook it from one position to the other. He was as tenacious as a bulldog of any argument he adopted, and having once allowed the possibility of dishonorable action on the part of the Rector, the uncertainty grew to probability, and from that leaped with a fierce bound to certainty.

“What an ass I was not to have see’d it afore! That’s wheer the money’s come from. And he a-pretending to be that high-minded, and that generous, and that self-sacrificing, and do it all for the glory o’ the Church. Not him. You’ve hit it, Isaac Stringer. You’ve hit it on the nail, that you have. He’s sold th’ ode book, and I’m just goin’ to show it all up, and let the parish know what a son o’ Belial that theer bed-gownin’ Rector’s turned out to be.”

He was fully convinced, before he had walked many hundred yards, that Dr. Hay was the guiltiest of men, untrue to his charge, steeped in the practices of Moloch,

and endeavoring to conceal behind a bland and smooth countenance the grimaces of a Papist culprit to whom a Protestant Bible, hallowed by the use of centuries within the House of God, conveyed no idea of sacredness, but simply represented so many pounds, shillings, and pence to be expended upon his own sacrilegious fancies, according to the promptings of Beelzebub and similar weird personages. But he had him by the heels this time, the wicked, scandalous impostor. He had but to write to the great expert in London, and the trick would be exposed, and all the parish would be indebted to him, Isaac Stringer, for having opened their eyes.

It never for a moment entered Stringer's mind that the great expert might, after all, pronounce the book in the church to be the real genuine article. He had thoroughly hammered it into his obstinate mind that the book was a forgery—a bare-faced imitation—and a bare-faced imitation it had to be. The Rector's guilt was as plain as daylight, and when he stood at his own door and the latch clicked under his hand, he came to be filled with a sort of placid wonder at his own credulity in not having suspected it before.

He set down his hat on the little round table in the corner of the front parlor with the conscious assurance of being about to undertake a work of stern duty, and, as usual, when he felt that he was doing his duty, he imagined that he had to be surly to himself and to everybody else. Duty and pleasantness were as incompatible to Stringer's mind as acid and alkali are to the chemist. He began his task by shouting "Mary" in as gruff a voice as he could command; and the second call brought the girl bounding to the door, looking

with frightened eyes for the cause of her father's annoyance. Something had gone wrong, that was certain. Something was not dusted cleanly enough, his favorite pipe had been removed from its accustomed place, one of the quaint bits of Staffordshire pottery which stood on the mantel-shelf had fallen down, and was broken; and any one of these was enough to cause the rest of the day to be marked with tears in Mary's calendar — the poor girl knew that well enough.

"Why canst not come when I call thee?" shouted Stringer.

"I did come, father, the moment I heard you."

"Sit down, theer," enjoined the irascible parent, feeling that perhaps, after all, Mary had not committed any very special sin at that moment. He softened a little in his tone, and, though it was but just a little, the girl's practised ear caught the change immediately. "Tek your pen an' paper," he continued, pointing to the inkstand on the sideboard, "and write as I tell thee."

Mary obeyed tremblingly. What was that letter to be about? Close to her heart lay the epistle in which her brother announced his speedy departure for fields of battle in the Far East. Was her father about to command her to write to Joseph? From his tone it was bound to be a cruel, unforgiving, unfatherly letter. Her fears were eased, however, when Stringer, standing behind her and looking over her shoulder, tapping with his big, fat forefinger by the side of the sheet of paper she had placed in front of herself, evidently searching for a mode of commencing the letter, blustered out:

"'Sir, Squire Boyer has given me your name and address.'"

Mary's heart felt as if a load of granite had been removed from it, and her fingers, which had been trembling, became steadier.

“‘I want you to come down here,’” continued Stringer, accentuating each word with a thump of his finger on the table, and disconcerting Mary awfully by so doing, “‘and look at an old Bible as is chained up in the church here, and tell me if it's a real old Bible, or one o' them new-fangled counterfeits.’ What art thee writin’?” he shouted: “I said one o' them new-fangled counterfeits.”

Mary looked up at her father pleadingly.

“I can't put ‘one o' them new-fangled counterfeits,’” she said; “I have put ‘modern imitations.’”

“That's it,” growled Stringer. “That's what comes of them teachin's of the Rector's. It's the children what corrects the father now.”

He knew, however, full well that Mary's corrections of style would be right and proper, and therefore made pretence of swallowing a just wrath, and to be actuated by a spirit of forgiveness which was wholly strange to his character, and did not for one moment impose upon Mary.

“Go on,” he cried, seating himself in a chintz-covered arm-chair some two or three yards behind the girl; “go on, and write what I tell you. ‘I am willing to pay your fair and legal charges and expenses up to thirty pound, and I hope that it can be done for the money, and that you can come down at once, as the matter is hurgent.’”

He noticed that Mary had left out the *h*, and passed that act of petty rebellion in silence. The missive was signed and addressed, and he held it in his hand tenderly,

gingerly, as an amateur might handle a valuable print.

“And mind thee what,” he said to Mary, as he put on his hat, and made ready to go to the post-office. “Mind you keep a close tongue in your head. I don’t want the parson to know nothin’ about this — not till the time comes. Dost hear?”

“Yes, father,” replied Mary.

“None o’ your blabbering with th’ ode women.”

“No, father.”

“That’s enough. You can go.”

“Yes, father.”

He felt happy for the moment. He had done his duty, and had done it in as unpleasant a manner as even he could do it, and he was prepared to continue in that course of action as long as breath would hold in his body.

Whilst Isaac Stringer was walking along the High Street towards the little grocer’s shop where Her Majesty’s post-office was ensconced behind flour barrels and boxes of lump sugar, carrying in his hand the missive which was charged with so much danger for the occupant of the Rectory, an epistolary bomb-shell, not of his manufacture, whizzed into and exploded in his own household.

Mary, after her father’s departure, sat herself down by the open parlor window, looking with wistful eyes after his figure as it disappeared at the turning of the deserted High Street. She wondered, in her unsuspecting, girlish mind, what that epistle of her father’s meant, and why he had been so peremptory in commanding her silence on the subject. Why should not the Rector know that her father had doubts about the genuineness of the book, which everybody in the village

believed so sacred, not only by its own origin, but by the memories of ages? If the book had been tampered with by anybody, surely the Rector ought to be the first person to know. Whatever her father's faults might have been to others, in her eyes he had few. And to counteract them he was, to her, the incarnation of many virtues, honest, uncompromising straightforwardness being his chief. He was a little unkind now and then, she admitted, and would speak his mind with cruel and unjust harshness at times; but she had never known him to conceal aught before. As she sat there, with her little brain whirling with these conflicting thoughts, she noticed a dapper figure sauntering leisurely on the other side of the street, and yes — surely it was — yes, it was Mr. Cornelius Badger. He had not yet left the village, then. Mary's heart beat faster, and she felt her face grow cold and white as she saw him lift his tall hat with what appeared to her an incomparable grace. Was there anybody in Thorbury who could lift his hat like that? Mr. Frank Boyer, possibly, but she had never seen him do it so well. But then Mr. Frank Boyer was not in Thorbury, and he would not have lifted his hat to her with that perfect gentlemanly elegance. Mr. Frank Boyer would have nodded to her kindly, and said, "How do you do, Miss Stringer?" with that hale, bright voice of his. His greeting always was very nice and pleasing, but he could never have made her fingers tingle at the ends, and her little ears burn as they did just then.

Mr. Cornelius Badger, totally unaware of the small conflagration which he had kindled in that maidenly heart, and yet all the while determinedly desirous of making a favorable impression, replaced his hat, grinned

complacently, and nodded his head in a rapid motion very similar to that of a porcelain mandarin which has received a sudden smart tap. This Mr. Corney Badger intended to express his extreme pleasure at beholding Miss Stringer. Mary thought herself in duty bound to make some sort of silent reply, and dropped a stately countrified courtesy which, as she sat behind a high window-sill, was nearly totally lost upon Mr. Cornelius. The young man, however, believed instinctively that it conveyed to him some kind of encouragement, and made bold to cross the road. As he approached, Mary felt the blood mantle to her cheeks, but she bit her lip, and in a moment was as calm and self-possessed, to outward appearances at any rate, as any woman of the world might have been under similar circumstances. The young man stood by the window and again raised his hat with one hand, whilst in the palm of the other he concealed a letter which he allowed to slip from the window-sill into Mary's lap.

"I hope you will forgive the liberty, Miss Stringer," he said, with a smile which to the girl seemed ineffable. "I have written in that letter what I feel. Miss Stringer, you may believe it or you may doubt it, for I have not done anything to deserve your confidence; but if I were to conceal it any longer I should hexplode with the fire of it."

Cornelius had studied and repeated that speech to himself full forty and more times, and he did not feel quite sure when he had delivered it that he had got it off in its full vigor and rhetorical beauty. He had written and rewritten it on scraps of paper until he had admitted to himself that it excelled in that brevity which is the soul of wit, and yet boasted of a pathetic

eloquence which should go straight to the beloved one's heart. He was very proud of that phrase, "he should hexplode with the fire of it," and considered himself quite an embryo Milton on the strength of it.

Poor Mary, with that letter in her lap, felt herself a sort of Eve, to whom the serpent had just dropped the historical apple. She knew it was very wrong of her to receive that letter, and before even Mr. Badger had finished his speech she held it between her fingers, with the intention of returning it unopened to the young man. The latter, looking in the direction where Mr. Isaac Stringer had disappeared, suddenly raised his hat, this time with less studied grace than before, and walked away rapidly before Mary could give expression to her thoughts. The vision of paternal boots at the end of Mr. Stringer's legs rapidly approaching Mr. Stringer's residence had had this spontaneous and magical effect upon Mr. Cornelius Badger. Mary, guessing from the young man's manner that something was wrong, peered carefully out of the window, and saw that her father was returning from the post-office. She was a generally truthful, honest, and virtuously minded girl, and her conscience told her that she ought to hand that letter, addressed to her by a perfect stranger, to her father. That, she knew, was the proper and maidenly course which lay before her as plain as daylight. But there was a something that dragged at her skirts, that pinched her and diverted her thoughts, something that pulled at her sleeve and whispered with such soft, oily persuasion, "Read that letter! You ought to read that letter! You will so like to read that letter! It will please you so much!" And Mary's heart went palpitating, and she crumpled the letter

between her little fingers and pushed it hastily into her pocket. And the great bell-like voice of conscience rang, "Give that letter to your father!" and a little insinuating falsetto jingled through it and over it and soared above it, "Keep it, read it by and by! It will be so nice." And Mary's fingers burned as they involuntarily crushed the letter in her pocket, and when the door swung open, and Mr. Isaac Stringer entered the parlor, the voice of the serpent had gained the day.

"What did that theer young jackanapes want a-standin' at my winder? He was a-talkin' to thee, was he?"

Mary, catching a glimpse of herself in the glass opposite, saw that her face was ashen, and she could barely stammer, —

"Yes, father."

"And what was he a-sayin' to thee, if you please?" roared Mr. Stringer, setting down his hat on the table with a tap as an emphasis. "What's got a young man as nobody knows nothin' about to be a-talkin' to my gal for, as was brought up respectable and Christian-like, and to be a horniment to her sex?"

Mary, shrinking back a step or two, replied tremblingly:

"I don't know, father."

"Oh! you don't know, thee doesn't. And how does he come a-comin' here if he's had no hencorridgement from thee?"

"I have not encouraged him," whimpered Miss Mary; "I assure you I have not."

At this reply Mary felt just a trifle guilty, and if her father had appeared to her less loud-voiced and stern at that moment, she would have found it in her heart to

give him the letter and to tell him the whole truth. But the bullying bluster frightened her, and her good purpose shrank back tremblingly, chilled by fear.

"That's just what women folks always says when Satan's a-pullin' them by the petticoats. It's niver their fault — not they. If I catch that theer bag-o'-sticks a-runnin' after thee agin, I'll break every bone in his body; and if I hear of thee as much as a-sayin' 'good-morning' to him, I'll lock you up in the washus for a week. Thee canst not tomfool me."

"I'm not trying to deceive you, father," whimpered Mary. And all the while that broad gong within her sounded deep and clear: "Thou art deceiving him. Show him that letter!" And the fussy little high-pitched chime tinkled, "Don't, don't, don't! Read it by and by." Mary fought bravely, and, had but a flicker of Christian charity shone in her father's face, probity would have been an easy victor. But it was not to be, and when the girl went to bed that night the tempter's letter lay beneath her pillow, and she knew every word of it by heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE thorns of impatience pricked Mr. Stringer severely during the next two days. He was not a generally impatient man, and he was perfectly aware that two clear days at least must elapse before he could have an answer from London; but when the third morning came, and then the fourth, and no letter was brought to him with his shaving water, he began to feel anxious about the result of his covert attack upon the Rector, and passed the rest of that day about the church and the vestry, taking many occasions to examine the sacred Book and to convince himself by arguments of his own that it was not the original old Bible. He was cute enough to make as little outward show as possible of his intention and opinion. The mine was laid, the fuse nearly ready, and he would explode it at the proper moment, and send Rector and Papistry floating towards realms unknown. He became quite a little nuisance to the workmen employed in the work of restoration. Carpenters, joiners, bricklayers alike suffered by his criticisms and interferences. He had made up his mind that nothing that was being done about the church was right, and he meant to show his disapproval to each and all concerned. It was late on the evening of the fourth day after the despatch of his own missive when the lean, lank, and limping lad who combined the offices of boy-of-all-work in the grocery shop with that of village postman, handed to Mr. Isaac Stringer a letter bearing

the London postmark. The great London bookseller acknowledged the receipt of Mr. Stringer's letter. "My principal expert," he added, "is at this moment engaged in cataloguing and appraising Lord Wands-haugh's library. I have written to him instructing him to call and see you, and you may expect a visit from him in the course of the next few days." This was pleasant reading to Mr. Stringer, but what followed was at least equally agreeable. "My charge for the services of the expert," continued the letter, "will not be thirty pounds, but merely five, with hotel and travelling expenses, which may be about three pounds more. I trust this arrangement will be satisfactory to you." (Mr. Stringer thought it eminently satisfactory.) "A written statement of opinion would cost you two guineas more."

Mr. Stringer thought that he could and would afford the two guineas.

Mr. Stringer carried that letter about in his pocket as if it were a talisman to drive away the ills that flesh is heir to. He read it and re-read it a dozen times. On the following forenoon he rambled in the churchyard in the listless, aimless manner he had got accustomed to during the last few days, poking about the loose bricks and mortar and the piles of beams and broken wood-work, and he was shocked beyond measure to find that the carpenters had completely removed the front of the old oak presses which occupied the whole of one side of the vestry, and in which the service plate, the records of the church, and many other valuables were kept. He could see them there lying on the shelves. His ire was increased when Jonah came shambling into the place, and commenced to make a rough-and-tumble parcel of some of the articles.

Mr. Stringer, standing with his hands behind his back, and pursing his lips, contemplated the young man's doings, and was undecided in his mind whether the act that was being committed came under the denomination of sacrilege, burglary, or petty larceny.

Jonah had brought quite a pile of unbleached sheets, and had with clumsy fingers made a clumsy bundle of a heterogeneous lot of things. He was in the act of picking up the bundle and placing it lazily on his shoulder, when Mr. Stringer, shaking a threatening forefinger at him, and nearly speechless with rage, stopped him.

"What's that you're doin', Jonah Wood?" asked Mr. Stringer.

The lad looked at him with a wry smile. He shouldered the bundle.

"It hasn't got nothin' to do with thee, gaffer," he replied, and moved towards the door.

Isaac Stringer's heavy hand gripped him by the arm.

"It hasn't got nothin' to do with me, hasn't it?" he cried; "I ain't churchwarden here, am I? I'm nobody, am I? I'm to stand by here and see a hulking, good-for-nothin' lout as ought to ha' bin in jail long ago, and will be theer afore long, I trow, a-walkin' away with the church property right out o' the church door, before the churchwarden, and the churchwarden, if you please, isn't to ask no question about it!"

With that he gave the young man's arm a twist as though he would wrench it off, and sent him spinning and stumbling back into the middle of the vestry, where the bundle fell with a crash and a clatter on to the floor. Jonah stood before his bulky aggressor, and his eyes flashed.

"Heer, gaffer, I say," he exclaimed, "you're a-goin'

just a bit too fur, and mark you, Mr. Stringer, church-warden though you be, I ain't a-goin' to stand thee nor no other man neither a-pullin' and a-shakin' me about when I ain't doin' nothin' that's wrong to nobody. I've got my horders, and you touch me agin as you did just now, and see what'll come of it."

With that he doggedly prepared to pick up the bundle, casting glances of fury towards the equally furious Stringer. The latter, for all answer, walked to the vestry door and placed himself there with arms akimbo. In his ire he was totally oblivious of the fact that balrey six feet further on there was a hole in the wall through which three men might have walked with ease linked arm to arm.

"Oh," he answered, "thee's got thy horders, and I'm not to touch thee agin or see what'll come of it! I know what'll come of it, Jonah Wood. You'll go to the gallows, Jonah Wood. That'll be the hexpedition you'll undertake." He suddenly assumed an air of satirical politeness, and, taking off his hat, bowed with a burlesque imitation of courtesy. "I've got to be very civil to thee, Jonah Wood, I suppose, else I might go and get hurt. I mustn't touch thee, but I may hask thee a question. If you've got your horders, Jonah Wood, may I mek so bold as to inquire who give you your horders?"

"I've got my horders from Dr. Hay," stubbornly replied Jonah, refusing to be appeased by Mr. Stringer's satirical sally. "That's good enough for thee, gaffer, and don't you stop me no more."

With that he picked up his bundle, while Stringer stood in the doorway grinding his teeth, rubbing his hands, and grinning savagely all the while.

Jonah, I have no doubt, knew nothing of the threat of that English traveller who, being stopped by the Custom-House officer of a petty German principality, told the obstinate official that he would not pay the amount of toll demanded, but would drive *round* his little State. Jonah saw that the door was blocked by the burly presence of Isaac Stringer, and he felt sure that Mr. Stringer meant fight. Now, Jonah, although he had often proved himself plucky enough in pugnacious contests with lads of his own kind, felt no desire to engage in fisticuffs with the churchwarden of the parish. He knew that in such an encounter he was sure to come off second best, though at that moment he was only doing his duty and carrying out the Rector's instructions. He eyed Mr. Stringer up and down, from his gyrating hat to his cleanly blacked boots, and then, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, walked to and through the opening at the further end of the vestry out into the churchyard.

Everybody knows that the proverbial camel's proverbial back was broken by the proverbial straw. The reader is already aware that Jonah was no favorite of Mr. Stringer's. The dogmatic warden of Thorbury Church always looked upon himself as a perfect model of patience and Christian forbearance, and in his present intercourse with the defiant Jonah, he imagined himself actuated by the most exemplary spirit of judicial impartiality. But when Jonah impudently declined to force his way past him, and, after the manner of the just quoted traveller, calmly walked *round* him, Mr. Stringer felt that the cup of bitterness was overflowing, and that he was in duty bound to resent the insult added to injury.

Jonah, with his long stride, had already got a good dozen yards ahead when he felt Mr. Stringer's thick fingers inserting themselves between his neck-handkerchief and his neck, and twisting that useful wrap so that it became a most dangerous article of clothing. At the same time he felt himself pulled and tugged at so viciously that the bundle escaped from his grasp and again lay upon the ground. Assaulted from behind in this uncompromising fashion, he defended himself after the manner of village lads, and kicked out vigorously. Jonah's feet were big, and his boots were bigger, and they were iron-clumped, and hob-nailed, and they made a painful impression upon Mr. Stringer's shins. The burly man's shiny hat went spinning against a slanting gravestone, ricocheted thence, and rolled along the ground into a mass of wet mortar. Mr. Isaac was reluctantly compelled to relinquish his hold upon the dastardly offender, who stood rubbing his neck and arranging his neck-cloth in surly silence, whilst his aggressor went to pick up his injured head-gear.

"Wait thee a bit," cried Stringer, removing the mortar from the shiny silk fur, "wait thee a bit. I'll teach thee respect for thy elders and civility to your superiors."

"You can't teach me what you haven't got yourself, gaffer," growled Jonah. "Nobody never accused thee of being civil to no man, or woman neither."

Stringer was just in the act of making another dash at the lad when he saw the tall figure of Dr. Hay at the lych-gate. The Rector had evidently been a witness of a portion, at least, of the scene that had just passed.

"Dear me! dear me!" said Dr. Hay, walking towards them with rapid strides. "Why, Stringer, what's the

matter? What *is* the matter? And, Jonah, what have you been doing?"

"The matter?" roared Stringer, busily engaged in a futile attempt to restore its pristine gloss to his damaged hat. "That theer great red dragon with its seven heads and its ten horns was as nothing to the wickedness that's goin' on here now, and you approving of it, and encouraging of it, and a-horderin' of it."

"I don't understand you, my dear Stringer," said the Rector, with a smile. "I don't know what you mean."

"Aren't them the holy things of the church?" cried the churchwarden, pointing with outstretched finger to the open presses. "Isn't they the property of the church, and of the church honly, to be kept clean and whole for them as is to follow after us?"

"Quite so, Stringer, quite so," answered Dr. Hay as blandly as before.

"And aren't they a-lying theer in the dust and in the dirt, and you goin' so fur as actually removing 'em from the premises that is sacred to them as is not."

"Why, Stringer," said the Rector, good-humoredly, "I was only going to have them taken to the Rectory to prevent their being soiled or damaged while the most pressing repairs are proceeding."

"And you do this," continued the irate Stringer, in a tone where satire was intended to mingle with suavity and offended courtesy, "you do this, sir, without a-haskin' with your leave nor by your leave. The churchwardens is nobody, and the parish is nobody, and all the people in it is nobody, the Squire included."

"My good man," said Dr. Hay, in a voice which betrayed just the faintest suspicion of offended dignity, "if I had thought that you wanted to be consulted in

this matter, or that the matter was worth a consultation, I should certainly have asked your consent. I do not say that I concede to you the right of insisting on such a point, but I wish to live in peace with my neighbors, and since the removal of these things offends you, they shall not be removed, and I will take care that they are properly guarded and kept from harm in their original places in the vestry. Jonah!" he called, and the young man approached. "Take the sheets," he continued, "and carefully cover with them the front of the presses which are now open. Wrap up all articles which are likely to be damaged by dust, and remain in the vestry to watch over them. I am afraid, my lad, you will have to remain there all to-day and all night at the least. I will send you your meals from the kitchen. This arrangement," he said to Stringer, with a studied ceremony which was entirely strange to him, "will, I trust, satisfy you."

The churchwarden, taken aback both by the Rector's manner and by his course of action, listened in unsatisfied silence.

"I have only one thing to add, Stringer," continued the Rector, and this time his voice was stern. "If it should happen again that you should feel yourself called upon to object to any action of mine, I must beg of you that you will come to me and state your objection without interfering with my servants."

This speech roused Mr. Isaac from his seeming lethargy. He clapped the hat which he had been wiping carefully on his head, and stood glaring at the Rector, with his legs wide apart and his hands folded across his back.

"Hey de dee, diddle dee!" he exclaimed. "It's a sermon on a week-day."

“Week-day is as good as any day,” replied Dr. Hay, “when the truth has to be spoken. A churchwarden brawling with a lad like that in the open churchyard is a sorry spectacle, let me tell you, Stringer, and one which I hope I shall never see again.”

Dr. Hay was known to be so mild, so conciliating in his manner, and in all his intercourse with the domineering Stringer he had been so generally submissive, that this speech struck the burly man like a blow from a sledge-hammer, and left him speechless, with mouth agape and staring eyes.

In the meantime the Rector had walked away and disappeared behind the further end of the church, where other repairs were proceeding.

“Well, I niver!” exclaimed Stringer, when he had at last recovered the faculty of speech; “I niver in all my born days, niver, niver! He a-settin’ of himself up for to lecture me. He a-pretendin’ to be arrayed in the fine linen what’s righteousness. But what says the Scripture? ‘The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.’ Ay, ay.”

Mr. Stringer, being unacquainted with the Elizabethan dramatists, was equally unacquainted with the famous phrase about the devil citing Holy Writ. He watched with boiling inward anger whilst Jonah, his face ablaze with the broadest of grins, set slowly and measuredly to work to carry out the Rector’s instructions.

Stringer felt that in this encounter with the parson he had been far from victorious, but he consoled himself with the thought that the hour of vengeance was fast approaching.

The expert could reach Thorbury by any of the four

local trains which stopped at the village station, and three times in the course of the day Mr. Stringer performed a pilgrimage holy to revenge, and tramped up and down the little platform for full a quarter of an hour previous to the arrival of each train, without meeting the object of his search.

It was late in the evening already, and the twilight was drawing to its close. The last train did not reach Thorbury until eleven o'clock at night, and Stringer had made up his mind to go and meet that also. He was sitting by his open parlor window, and Mary was knitting, straining her eyes in the semi-darkness of the room, fearful of saying a word lest she should rouse her father's anger, when the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard at the further end of the village street, and a dog-cart came rattling over the rough stones and stopped at Stringer's door.

"That's the place, sir," said the driver, who wore the livery of one of the neighboring gentry. "That's Mr. Stringer's house — Bully Stringer we calls him — and there he is, to be sure, at his window."

"Thank you for nothin'," retorted Mr. Stringer, being thus addressed. "Thank you for nothin' for an impudent lout. I'll tell your master when I see him how you speak of your betters."

"Pray, don't mind him, sir," said the elderly gentleman who had just descended from the cart. "You are the Mr. Stringer, I suppose, who has written to London for a bibliographic expert?"

All memory of past injury, of recent insult, was wiped clean from Stringer's mind at these words, which fell upon him like a soothing balm. He flew, rather than ran, to the door which he opened with such re-

dundant courtesy that Mary looked around the room in silent wonder.

"I drove over here from Castle Barfield," continued the gentlemen. "A friend of mine lives there, and I thought I would see him on my road."

He was a lean little man with long whitish-gray beard and mustache and thin white hair. His clear gray eyes looked straight at Stringer and seemed to pierce him through and through. He was dressed in a black cloth frock-coat and trousers, and a white piqué waistcoat, and wore a broad soft felt hat, which gave a rather Bohemian aspect to his otherwise dignified appearance. To Mr. Stringer he looked eminently learned and authoritative, his head being the exact counterpart of a small round picture of an unnamed saint, in a big gold frame, which Mr. Stringer had bought at an auction in Birmingham, and prized as a sort of art wonder, it being all the while neither more nor less than the top of a German snuff-box. In the gladness of his heart Stringer could not help glancing at the spot where he knew the picture was hanging, but the fading light prevented him from comparing the living actuality with the portrait.

"You are welcome, sir," he exclaimed, "as welcome as I can mek you. We are homely people and this is a homely house; but theer's a bedroom on the first floor as I reckon you'll be able to sleep in comfortable. Light a candle, Mary, and let Sam take the gentleman's bag up stairs. Maybe you're tired, sir, and I reckon" — this with a faint hope that the expert might negative it — "it's too late to-day, and too dark, to look at the book now."

"I am afraid, sir, my eyes are not as good as they

used to be, and if there is a doubt on the subject about which you wish me to express an opinion, I would prefer daylight for my purpose."

"You're right, sir," replied Stringer; "and then perhaps it would be better if the Rector were there as well when you tell them that his book's a swindle."

"Oh, oh, oh, oh!" exclaimed the old man. "May I ask to what book you are referring?"

"To the Bible in Thorbury Church, what's supposed to be the real one; hundreds and hundreds o' years old, and it ain't so old as I or you are, sir, and ain't nothin' more than a fraud and a sham."

"Are you speaking of the Thorbury Bishops' Bible, sir?" asked the expert. "I had that book in my hands more than forty years ago, and I can state authoritatively that it is a genuine copy on vellum, one of the only three perfect ones known."

"That's just it," cried Stringer. "It was the genuine old Bible forty years ago right enough, afore this new Rector come into the parish; but you look at it to-morrow mornin', and you see if it's the same. If it is I'll eat my head. That Papist parson has swopped it, and I mek bold to say so to you."

"I know Dr. Hay," replied the expert quietly, "both by reputation and by intercourse, and I know him to be absolutely incapable of an unrighteous action. You seem to suspect him, and, in this case, I must claim to be allowed to write to him to make a formal appointment for the purpose of this examination."

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Dr. Hay returned to the Rectory from a visit to a dying parishioner. On the hall table he found a letter addressed to himself, and opened it.

"DEAR SIR," it ran, "I have been asked by Mr. Isaac Stringer to examine the Bishops' Bible in your church. Mr. Stringer expresses an opinion that the genuine work has been removed from the lectern, and exchanged for a modern imitation. Will you favor me with an appointment at your convenience to-morrow morning, that I may make the required examination, and report? I am staying at Mr. Stringer's house.

"I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

MARTIN WHITE."

The letter slipped from the Rector's hand.

"What can it mean?" he breathed. "What can it mean?"

There was a great eight-foot window at the further end of the hall, which led into the lawn, and as Dr. Hay looked out he saw a curious red flicker against the black, moonless sky. He rubbed his eyes in wonder as the glow seemed to grow and spread.

Suddenly there rang through the night a cry of "Fire! fire! The church is on fire!" And Dr. Hay, gasping for breath, sank down on the oaken hall chair.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE was only one person who was really happy over the result of the encounter between Mr. Stringer and the Rector, and that person was Jonah Wood. He enjoyed not only the comfortable recollection of having kicked the doughty churchwarden's shins — a thought which was equal in value to a good many pints of old ale to him — but he had been privileged to stand by and see Mr. Stringer “sat upon and squashed,” as he afterwards expressed it, by Dr. Hay. The temporary discomfiture of the pugnacious Stringer was ambrosial meat and Olympian drink to him, and his little soul soared to the realms of popular song to express its extreme momentary happiness. Jonah had not a bad voice, but his ideas of time and tune were of the most peculiar. He went to work at his pile of sheets, grinning and sniggering, winking with his left eye as he looked over his shoulder at his rotund adversary, whilst the latter bad-temperedly paced up and down the churchyard. Suddenly he burst out into a stave of the old song, which he entuned to a variation of his own, —

“Theer was a fair may-den what lived in a bow-urr,
That may-den was lovely to see,
She was sweet as a happle an’ red as a flow-urr,
An’ she loved a young man — and he’s me.”

At the first sound of Jonah’s voice, Mr. Stringer made a movement of impatience. Song of any kind

excepting that of the church was ribald and offensive to Mr. Stringer's ears, and a piano was to him a palpable evidence of ungodliness in the family that possessed it. But he happened for the moment to be all brooding meekness, all martyred expectation of a justice to come, and he looked upon the infliction of Jonah's untuneful effusion as a spice to the enjoyment of the victory which could not fail soon to be his. Therefore he simply scowled at the offender. He did not care by his presence to endorse the scandal of musical doggerel within the precincts of the church, and, therefore, walked away, casting angry glances back at Jonah.

Jonah, being thus left victor in possession of the field of battle, soon completed his easy task, and then stretched himself full length upon a lichen-covered tombstone outside the vestry door, and lay there in full enjoyment of the glorious summer sun. Jonah's idea of watch and duty were primitive enough in their way, and really there was no great need for strict guard, as not a soul entered the churchyard but those employed there, and not one of these would have dreamed of touching any of the valuables entrusted to Jonah's care. The day was passed by the lad in the alternate occupations of munching his bread and meat, and drinking his ale, and lying half asleep in the sunshine. The young man, having nothing whatever to do, got tired of his occupation before the evening came, and hungered, in his slow mind, for more stirring employment of his time.

It was six o'clock when the workmen left their task. The carpenters had taken down a lot of the old oak seating of the church, and had made a pile of it against the altar railings, reaching from the centre of the vestry to within a yard or two of the lectern. The carved old oak

panelling had also been removed from the chapel and stacked at the other side of the church, some of the long pieces leaning against the oak supports of the gallery. Inside the vestry the painters had made a heap of their utensils and materials. Cans of turpentine and oil, brushes and paints, were laid in promiscuous confusion against Master Jonah's sheets, and the sacred building and its contiguous premises presented the aspect of a storehouse. It gradually became darker, and Jonah, having been told that his watch would have to continue through the night, sat himself on the floor with his back against the pile of oak panelling, and, producing a torn and soiled out-of-time copy of Bell's Life in London, began the task of deciphering the description of a prize fight recorded there. Jonah was not an adept in the art of reading, and somehow or other he attributed the slow progress he made to the fading light. Searching about the vestry cupboard, he unearthed half a tallow candle. This, with the addition of a bit of paper, he stuck into the nozzle of a can of turpentine standing by his side, and lighted it. The process of reading the record word for word was tedious, and not in the least as inspiring as Jonah expected it to be. Be it that Jonah's rest during the previous night had not been such as an honest country lad ought to enjoy, or that his work during the day had extremely fatigued him, this deponent cares not to say; but the fact remained that Jonah's lids weighed heavily, and drooped, so that at last he stretched himself yawning on the floor, and dropped the dirty rag of a newspaper by his side. Jonah fell asleep, but his rest was far from tranquil, and he rolled from side to side and from one position to another with spasmodic movements of arms and legs.

The tallow candle was still burning when the sudden contact of Jonah's boot tipped over the can in which it was stuck, and it rolled, with the still flaming candle, against the vestry presses, covered as they were with Jonah's sheets. The inflammable liquid trickled from the can between the interstices of the paper, and soon touched the flame of the candle itself. After a faint spluttering and hissing, it ignited with a resinous light, and communicated itself to the sheets on the presses. These in their turn caught the lurid infection, and the fire crept along them, slowly at first; then, fanned by the draught which came through the open church windows, it crept and leaped sideways and upwards with ever-increasing speed and destruction. The fierce element snaked and rolled around the old dry woodwork which was stacked in piles here and there. Its red tongues licked it and set it ablaze, and the vestry had become a roaring furnace before Jonah, starting in a fright out of his sleep, saw, with glaring eyes and hair standing on end, the mischief his wicked carelessness had wrought. Utterly helpless in the presence of the devouring element, he could do nothing but howl like a fiend or like a frightened beast. Although the brook was so near, the idea of attempting to extinguish the flames never entered his muddled brain, and he started to run towards the village, crying "Fire! fire! fire!" at the top of his voice.

At the back of Stringer's house there was a ramshackle garden in which a ramshackle summer-house had been rendered lovely by beautifying Nature with her bounteous greenery and her glorious wealth of blossom. The night, though dark, was balmy. Mr. Stringer,

having found Mr. White's conversation of the most congenial, edifying, and instructive, and having discovered in him an authoritative manner before which he bowed, invited the old gentleman to join him in a smoke and a glass of toddy in the garden before retiring to rest. The old scholar produced from his travelling-bag a quaint old German pipe, with long cherrywood stem and bone mouthpiece, and with a big, long, porcelain bowl, on which the arms of a Burschenschaft were portrayed in red and gold. This luxurious miracle of a smoking utensil became an object of admiration on the part of Stringer, and for once in his life he acknowledged that anything outlandish could be useful and salubrious. Somehow or other Mr. White, like Cæsar, had come, been seen, and had conquered. If it were the expectation of the service to come, or the old gentleman's native scholarly grace — something or other had made him a favorite in Stringer's eyes immediately after his arrival. The churchwarden went so far as with his own hands to brew his guest's toddy. The two were sitting in the summer-house, sipping their liquor and smoking their pipes in the tranquil night air, when Stringer, looking out across the back of his garden towards the little eminence where Thorbury Church was visible in the daytime behind its surrounding trees, saw a reddish light dancing in the darkness there.

“Strange!” he said to his companion; “theer oughtn't to be no light theer. I wonder if that Jonah is up to some o' them tricks o' his again.”

The little scintillating point grew and flickered and flashed, and a bright halo like that of a red Bengal fire spread around it and became visible between the foliage of Thorbury Churchyard.

“Good gracious me!” exclaimed Stringer; “what can it be? Theer’s something wrong, I vow. Theer’s nobody livin’ theer.”

He started up on a sudden.

“It’s fire!” he cried; “the church is afire! Here, Sam, Mary! shout, run! The church is afire! the church is afire!”

At the same moment confused noises grew upon the ear from the street without. The drowsy village became alive with sound. Voices calling, crying, shouting, yelling, resounded through the stillness of the night, and from the distance the rattling of horses’ hoofs and the rumbling of wheels could be heard distinctly.

“We’ll go an’ see what’s a-comin’ of it, sir,” said Stringer to his guest, who had returned with him to the parlor. “This is a bad job, and no mistake. I’m sorry — ” He stopped in the middle of his speech and looked at Mr. White with a strange expression, in which perplexity mingled with obstinate hate. “Do you know what strikes me, sir?” he said. “I’m a Christian man, I hope, and I don’t make no charges as I don’t think is right and proper and my duty to make. But let me remind you, sir, and let me ask you, sir, to make a note on it, so as to remember it if you’re hasked in a court o’ justice, that you wrote to the Rector nigh on two hours ago, telling him that you’ve come to look at that theer Bible.”

“Well! very well!” replied the expert. “What has that to do with me?”

“It has this to do,” continued Stringer, “that now the church is afire, an’ that Bible chained to the lectern in it, an’ most likely burned to a cinder afore this.”

The old man gripped Stringer by the arm.

"Surely you don't suggest," he exclaimed, "that Dr. Hay has committed arson for the purpose of destroying that book?"

"I don't suggest nothin'," retorted Stringer. "Only them's the facts. Theer's the hevidence, and on the rights an' wrongs of it a jury will have to decide."

Mr. Stringer was not the kind of man to keep his thoughts and impressions to himself, and long before he and his companion had reached Thorbury Church, which was by that time well ablaze, he had communicated the contamination of his ideas to sundry and various of Dr. Hay's opponents.

A little group was standing in Thorbury Churchyard by the burning church, and apart from the rest of the villagers, when Stringer arrived there. There was the Rector, bare-headed and pale-faced, his clothing ragged, burned, and torn by his efforts to rescue the church property. There was Habakkuk in a similar plight. A little apart stood Ophelia and Mrs. Hay, trembling and wringing their hands, and with them Squire Boyer, having momentarily forgotten his quarrels and his anger in the common danger and distress, and speaking such words of comfort and solace as a British gentleman can. A chain of men with buckets was toiling hard at the work of rescue, but the means at the disposal of the crowd for combat with the devouring element were so small that little hope could be entertained to save the ancient building.

The guilty cause of all the mischief had been caught, and was guarded by the policeman, who kept his hand on the culprit's ear with a vicious grasp, and explained from time to time to the inquiring villagers that in that young scamp they saw the destroyer of their church.

Little knots of smock-frocked and gaitered men, and of shawl-covered women, young and old, stood idly by, gossiping as if the present incident were one of the commonest in the world. Bit by bit the crowd increased, and bit by bit the hum of voices swelled and rose, and on a sudden it seemed to take a strange and fiercer tone. — Oaths and imprecations mingled with irate exclamations, in which the Rector's name was bandied about freely and openly, and Dr. Hay, turning round to discover the cause of the turmoil, found himself face to face with old Habakkuk, who was pointing a lean angry finger towards Isaac Stringer, who stood a few paces apart in burly, seething silence.

“Thee darest not tell him to his face,” cried the old sexton to Stringer, “thee backbitin’ wiper. Thee never couldst tell none but lies about no man, an’ now thee darest even slander the parson hisself.”

“What’s the matter, Habakkuk?” asked Dr. Hay quietly. “What do you mean?”

“Dost thee know,” replied the old man, in his wrath, “what that theer fellow is sayin’ about thee?”

“What does he say, my good Habakkuk?” asked Dr. Hay, with an amazed quiet, while all around became hushed, and every eye was peering towards the little group.

“Why, he’s a-sayin’,” continued the old man, writhing his arms excitedly in the air, “he’s a-sayin’ that thee hast set fire to the church to burn th’ ode Bible what’s in it.”

The Rector’s face turned gray, his hands trembled nervously, but his expression was that of majestic calm and dignity. Drawing himself up to his full height, he turned quietly to Stringer, who stood scowling doggedly at him, with his hands crossed behind his back.

"Is this old man speaking the truth, Stringer?" he asked, with the barest trace of emotion audible in his voice.

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the burly man, with bull-dog obstinacy.

"You say," continued Denis Hay, in the same calm, even voice, "that I set fire to the holy church for the purpose of destroying the Bishops' Bible?"

"Ay, ay, sir," was again the dogged reply.

The Rector made a step forward, and Squire Boyer rushed to him and gripped his hand.

"Don't take any notice of the meddlesome fool!" he cried. "Hold your tongue, Stringer. How dare you! If you repeat such a thing agin, I'll throttle you, you mischief-making idiot!"

A firm grip of the Rector's ice-cold hand thanked him, and Doctor Hay's outstretched arm waved him back.

"I must deal with this vile charge myself," he said, with such truth and dignity pealing in his voice that it went straight to all hearts but one. "I understand you, Stringer," he continued; "you think me capable of burning that book to conceal a fraud."

There was no reply this time, but a mere assenting nod of the head.

For a moment Dr. Hay's eyes travelled appealingly over those around him, then, without a word, and before his friends could guess his intention or restrain him, he walked erect and silent into the blazing building.

A dozen men flew after him, but it was too late, and all Boyer could do was to catch Mrs. Hay, who dropped with a shriek and in a faint into his arms, whilst Ophelia could with difficulty be kept from following her guardian.

Dr. Hay was not, as we know, a popular favorite with many of his parishioners, and only a moment before their angry voices had risen into the night against him, but at the sight of that deed of derring-do their British sense of fairness smote straight home to their hearts. When half a minute afterwards the Rector appeared again at the church door, black against the lurid glow of the conflagration, there arose such a shout of approval as made the night air ring with glad emotion. For a second or two the Rector staggered at the portal of the sacred edifice, his clothing singed and burning, his hair gone, his face swollen and red, his eyes closed, and in his hands the book which had been the cause of all this trouble. He reeled a step or two forward, and then fell on his face on the sward. In another moment the head of the drooping, fainting figure reclined on Boyer's knee, whilst a dozen tender hands busied themselves about him. Stringer stood by, shamefacedly, but as obstinate as ever. He picked up the Bible, which was lying on the grass, and handed it to the expert, who had been standing quietly behind him.

"Maybe you can tell me if that book's right, sir," he whispered.

Mr. White looked at the churchwarden with a stony contempt, but he took the book, scorched as it was, and carried it into the light of the flaming building. He looked at it but for a second or two, and then handed it back to Stringer.

"Well," asked the latter, "what of it?"

"It is a modern imitation," replied the expert.

Stringer turned a satisfied glance to the group which surrounded the still unconscious Rector.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed. "I knew it!"

CHAPTER XV.

DR. HAY lay in his darkened room at the Rectory. Loving hands had carried him thither, and gentle fingers were busy tending his wounds. He was tortured by intense pain; the agony pearled on his red and singed brow, swathed as it partly was in cambric wrappings. A great surgeon had been telegraphed for from Birmingham, and had ordered absolute quiet.

"Let them read to me, pray, doctor," the Rector had pleaded. "The hours are so long and the darkness so black."

The surgeon had consented after some hesitation, and a small, deeply shaded reading-lamp was placed behind a small screen by the bedside, and Mrs. Hay read with slow and trembling voice the words of the Psalmist.

She came to the passage ;

"They that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty : then I restored that which I took not away."

A half-suppressed cry of agony surged from the sufferer's lips. Mrs. Hay, with the tears running fast over her cheeks, rose, and took her husband's burning hand.

"Try to sleep, my darling," she said. "Try to sleep. My reading excites you."

"The Bible! The Bishops' Bible!" the sufferer stammered hoarsely.

"Now, don't, pray don't," Mrs. Hay insisted gently. "I will not allow you so to distress yourself."

"But I brought it out. I brought it out, my dear. Where is it? What has become of it?"

Each word was a cry of agony, each sentence an anguished appeal.

Nobody knew. None about the house could tell what had become of the book. They hardly dared to tell him at first, but they knew that it could not be lost, and messengers were soon speeding all over the village to inquire after the missing volume. About half an hour afterwards one of the men returned, and Mrs. Hay was told that he brought news of the old Bible. She went out into the hall to see him.

"Muster Stringer," said the man, "he have got th' ode book, an' he do say as he do not mean to give it up."

The patient's anxious renewed inquiries forced them to tell him that Stringer held and declined to surrender the volume which the Rector had rescued from the flames at so great a cost.

"I am glad that it has been found," the injured man whispered. "I see no reason why he should not keep it, for the present at any rate. He will not injure it, that I know. He is obstinate, but not wicked."

The assurance that the book was safe seemed to ease the sufferer's mind, and Sleep with her soothing fingers brought sweet rest and balmy forgetfulness to that couch of pain.

Mr. Isaac Stringer had carried the volume home to his own house with the pride akin to that of a scientist who has wrested from Nature one of her secrets.

Mary, who, according to good country custom, and

town custom too, for that, ought to have been asleep hours before, had been kept awake, partly by the dramatic events of the night, and partly by the perusal, over and over repeated, of a second epistle from the elegant and love inspiring Mr. Cornelius Badger. She was sitting half dressed behind the little curtains of her bedroom window, when she heard her father's unmistakable footfall on the round kidney-flints of the village sidewalk. She slipped on a loose wrapper, and the latch had hardly clicked under Mr. Stringer's hand when his daughter's head peeped over the staircase, and the flicker of a tallow candle spread its smeary light over a portion of the entrance-hall.

Mr. Stringer, proud in the possession of his newly found proof of the Rector's guilt, was disposed to be more than usually lenient towards minor offenders, his daughter included, yet the very fact of Mary's being awake at that hour without his special permission, even under circumstances which might naturally produce such an occurrence, was an act of open rebellion against his parental authority, and, as such, must needs be reproved. Mr. Stringer was not a father who was likely, under any pretext, to spoil the child by sparing the rod.

"An' what's thee got to be up at this hour for?" he cried, when his guest and himself had entered.

Mary began to stammer, "I couldn't sleep, father—" when she was interrupted.

"You've got a light theer. Can't you see the gentleman is waitin'."

Mary, drawing the loose wrapper closely about her, came timidly down the stairs, and handed a lighted candle to her father. The latter, in his inward smiling

contentment about his bitterly fought for and hardly won victory against the Rector, was half inclined to repent himself of his harsh address to his child. As Mary was about to return in awkward shyness towards the stairs, her father caught her by the arm—not roughly—and turned her round. She, expecting a renewed scolding, disposed herself for a good cry, but for once Mr. Stringer's face creamed into a broad smile.

"Thee art not a bad wench," he said, "if you wouldn't hirritate me so. Now, don't cry. I hate women's tears."

Mr. Stringer had intended this speech as a soothing balm upon his daughter's wounded feelings. He thought himself extremely kind and loving, but to Mary it sounded just a little more harsh by reason of its pretended jocularity.

"I'm not crying, father," she replied awkwardly; and, again trying to pull her wrapper closer round her, she dropped a folded piece of paper, neither more nor less than Mr. Cornelius's last epistle, which she had treasured all the while in her hand.

No one would have given Mr. Stringer credit for the agility which he displayed, for he pounced upon the piece of paper like a hawk upon a singing bird, and unfolded it, and proceeded to read it, whilst Mary, with a white face, stood tremblingly by.

"Oh, it's Mr. Badger what writes to thee!" he hissed.

"Yes, father," she replied tearfully.

"Go to bed!" he cried, with an alarming quiet in his voice. "I'll talk to you in the morning, my girl. I'll badger Mr. Badger an' you, both. If I don't, my name ain't Isaac Stringer."

"I hope you'll excuse me, sir," he said, when the girl

had left the room sobbing as if her heart would break ; “but there’s a young jackanapes — a rascal, as is trying to play ducks an’ drakes with my girl’s reputation, and to-morrow morning I’ll wallop the pair of ’em. I ain’t going to have no snakes crawling about my parlor a-ttempting my daughter to sin an’ shame.”

White simply nodded with a well-bred uninterestedness. Stringer’s manner and whole proceeding had proved peculiarly offensive to the old scholar, and he desired simply to fulfil his errand as speedily as possible, and to wash his hands of the whole business — of Mr. Stringer, his foibles, and his surroundings.

“If you will permit me,” the old gentleman said, “I will go to bed. I am very tired, and I wish to get away early in the morning.”

“Might I be hasking too much, sir,” Mr. Stringer demanded, “if I was to beg of you to write out your certifiket to-night, that this book’s a forgery ? ”

“If you particularly wish it I’ll do so,” Mr. White replied fatiguedly. “It will not be necessary then for me to see you in the morning.”

Mr. Stringer’s head and skin both were too thick to be touched by the intended acerbity of the remark.

“It would oblige me,” he answered ; and, fetching pen, ink, and paper, he laid them and the Bible on the table.

The expert glanced for a few moments at the book, and turned over many of its leaves, one after the other. Then he wrote as follows :

“The copy of the English Bible, edition folio, 1568, commonly known as the Bishops’ Bible, submitted to me by Mr. Isaac Stringer, of Thorbury, is made up of a manipulated copy on vellum of the facsimile published

by Hawkins. It is bound in the restored original leather-covered boards."

He signed the paper and handed it to Stringer.

"Won't you say as it's a forgery?" the latter exclaimed in disappointment.

"I have given a proper and formal description of the state of the book, of its origin and contents. It answers all possible questions."

"But surely it's either a forgery or it ain't," Mr. Stringer insisted. "Can't you say plain and straightforward if it's a good book or a bad book? That's what I'm a-paying my money for, ain't I?"

"I have said all I intend to say, and all that need be said," the old man answered with dignity; "and now, sir, I wish you good-night."

Stringer sat and looked after the expert as the latter disappeared through the doorway, with mingled feelings of indignation and amazement. The old scholar's manner forbade open signs of resentment, but the fact remained, nevertheless, that he, Isaac Stringer, had been openly defied and rebuked. Was his triumph to be embittered, after all, and was he to taste a portion of the cup of gall he was preparing for his adversary? He turned the document over and over again, he read it and re-read it; but both its wording and its meaning might just as well have been expressed in Chaldean for all the light they threw for him upon the subject he desired to be cleared up.

"He said as it is a forgery," he argued with himself; "and I suppose that's what he means by all this outlandish lingo. What's he got to be writing in a language that a man can't understand? Henglish is good enough for me. I wish I did know what he says," he added,

holding the document at arm's length, and looking at it thus, as if thereby he would be better able to read it. "I know what I'll do; I'll go and get the Squire to translate it for me."

He placed the certificate inside the book, and closed the heavy cover with a bang.

Just for one moment the thought flashed across his mind, "If the book is a forgery, why did the Rector go and fetch it out of the fire?" and a half-confused picture formed itself before his eyes, just behind the yellow flare of the tallow candle, out of a tiny wreathlet of smoke emitted by the flame. Mr. Stringer was not an imaginative man — in fact, a being more wooden-minded and practically prosaic could not well be found — but somehow or other that grayish cloudlet grew into a hazy veil, which in its turn lifted, and he could see the Rector's face, the Rector's eyes as they had looked upon him, full of outraged dignity, of withering majesty, the moment before that appalling venture for the rescue of the book. He remembered the feeling of awe and amazement which had struck him at the time, only to be forgotten in the self-satisfaction of his vindicated purpose.

Now, Stringer was neither a bad, nor a really uncharitable, nor a really vindictive man at heart; he was simply pig-headed, and, having once caught hold of anything, he stuck to it with bull-dog tenacity. Had he begun by liking the Rector, he would have defended him with as much unreasoning obstinacy as he now expended in attacking him, and in his heart of hearts he felt just a little qualm lest Dr. Hay was not so black as he himself desired to paint him. That walk into the fire staggered Mr. Stringer, but here again the church-

warden's *solatium omnium* appeared with all its comfort.

"What's the good of harguing?" Mr. Stringer said in self-converse. "I've got to do my dewty."

That word brought to him the sense of another function he had promised to perform in the morning, that of "walloping" Mr. Badger and Mary.

He took the Bible, with the document enclosed, and locked it up in one of the drawers of the sideboard. Then he sat himself down by the round centre-table, and, taking his spectacles this time, set to work to read Mr. Badger's effusion. Work it was, for Mr. Badger's handwriting was of that complicated and erratic kind which can only be acquired by long absences from school. In addition to that, Mr. Cornelius had chosen an ink which made an impudent pretence of being violet. This he had intended as a sort of underlining to his amatory expressions. The ink, however, failed ignominiously in looking like anything but a dirty gray, and what with the bad light, the faint ink, and the barely legible writing, Mr. Stringer's eyes and temper were both tried sorely.

"Most honored and adored Miss," commenced Mr. Cornelius, "I should have written before again if I had not been afraid that your respected father might find it out, and object."

"I'll 'respected father' him," growled Mr. Stringer, turning up an imaginary shirt-sleeve, and looking round an imaginary stable for an imaginary horsewhip; "I'll object him, and her too, for that! So the hussy's had a letter before this one. They've been carrying on correspondence, they have."

With this inspiring reflection he continued his perusal.

"Believe me, most lovely of her sex," said the letter, "that my intentions is most honorable."

"I'm glad to hear that," grunted Mr. Stringer.

"And if you was to allow me to say so to you with my own voice, I could do it much better than in writing, as my pen is bad. Therefore, if you could meet me at the stile by the Barfield Road at any hour to-morrow afternoon, where I will be waiting for you, you would confer a great favor on yours, who adores you until death, CORNELIUS BADGER."

"My young friend, I will be there, if my daughter won't," Mr. Stringer exclaimed, and pushed the letter into his trousers pocket. The epistle and its quaint style had nothing ludicrous for him. He never for one moment considered that his own bringing-up of his daughter ought to have been sufficient warranty against her falling into a snare; but all her previous virtuous and modest and maidenly conduct had not a feather's weight with her father. He perceived the attack, and took its success as a matter of course.

He went to bed, rather tired by the impression of the events through which he had passed, and but a very few minutes after his head had touched his pillow he was snoring loudly.

He woke rather later than usual, and, having discovered that fact on consulting his watch, he dressed himself, in a very bad humor, and went downstairs. His morning meal was laid out, as was customary, in the breakfast-room; the teapot and its cosey were standing on the table, and he could hear the singing of the kettle on the kitchen fire. But there was an ominous silence about the place, a peculiar deadness, an absence of some sound or other to which he was

accustomed. His temper grew worse, and he was about to give vent to it, when on his plate, which stood ready for him, he saw a note addressed to himself in the handwriting of his daughter. A cold sensation crept over him as he sat down slowly, and with trembling hands tore open the envelope.

“My dear father,” Mary’s letter said, “I have done no wrong, believe me, and never mean to. You have been a very good father, but you are unkind at times, and I dare not face you this morning. I am going to service to earn my own living. Sam can do the work of the house, and you can get old Susan to come and help him. Good-by, father dear, and God bless you.”

There were half a dozen dull round spots on the surface of the paper, where Mary’s tears had taken away the gloss. Stringer, with a vacant stare, unconsciously glanced round the room. It looked so empty. There was not a sound on the stairs or in the kitchen but the singing of the kettle. He felt so lonely, and, for the first time in his life, he knew what the feeling meant. Both his children gone, and he alone to pass his old days amidst strangers. He could not make it out why it was, but he did not see quite so well. He tried to look across the garden, and he could not see the summer-house which he knew was there, and several times he tried to speak to himself, and found that something prevented him, and things were altogether wrong and uncomfortable and unusual. What had he done to deserve it all?

On a sudden he shook himself together; he hitched up his trousers, and drew his hand across his eyes.

“Let her go!” he cried. “Let her go! Let her go with Joseph. I’ve only been doing my dewty. Let her go! I don’t want to see her face again.”

CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN the great Birmingham surgeon called early on the following day at the Rectory, he ordered, after a prolonged and careful examination, that the patient should be kept in as nearly absolute darkness as was compatible with his necessities. On descending to the dining-room he scribbled a telegram to a famous London oculist, begging the latter to spare the time to meet him at Thorbury Rectory on the following day. He handed the telegram to the servant for transmission to the office.

Mrs. Hay and Ophelia stood by, trembling.

"There is nothing serious the matter with my husband's eyesight, is there, doctor?" Mrs. Hay asked in an anguished voice.

"Don't distress yourself, my dear Mrs. Hay," the surgeon replied. "In cases like this I always prefer a specialist's advice. There are grave reasons for careful treatment, and for obtaining the best opinion that can be had for love or money, and I will see that Dr. Hay has both."

The surgeon's deliberate utterance brought but cold comfort to their sorrowing hearts. The doctor's words, his precautions, the surroundings which he prescribed for the sufferer, all pointed towards danger, serious danger, for the Rector's eyesight.

Dr. Hay bore his tortures uncomplainingly. His wife sat by his bedside in the darkness, and in the adjoining

room Ophelia shared her aunt's sorrow. Neither of the ladies had understood, or could understand, the reason of Dr. Hay's act. Neither of them, in their supreme confidence in his goodness and calm judgment, had as yet asked a question about it. But somehow or other the news reached the kitchen, and thence extended to the servants' hall, and from there travelled to the upper rooms, that Stringer had accused the Rector of having done something that was unlawful, and that Dr. Hay, to prove the justice of his case, had walked into the fire, and brought out the Holy Book. To Mrs. Hay and Ophelia the report seemed neither unreasonable nor unlikely, and they accepted it as probably the correct version of the case. Both knew that the pig-headed warden of Thorbury Church was capable of going to extremes in his opposition to the Rector, and of course they were equally sure their husband and uncle was absolutely guiltless of any charge his obstinate enemy might bring against him.

Mrs. Hay and Ophelia were discussing the report which had reached them by way of the servants' quarters, when a card was handed to the Rector's wife, bearing the inscription, "Martin White, M. A."

On descending to the drawing-room they found the old scholar, who disconsolately asked after Dr. Hay's condition.

"I am afraid, my dear ladies," he said, "that I have to add to your troubles; but I should not only be neglecting my duty, but also be acting in anything but a kindly spirit towards Dr. Hay, if I forbore from communicating to you what has come to my knowledge."

"Your preamble makes me tremble about what is to follow," said Mrs. Hay anxiously.

“You must be prepared for something serious,” Mr. White continued; “but even at the present moment I have no doubt that, as far as Dr. Hay is concerned, a perfect explanation will be readily forthcoming.”

Mrs. Hay’s face turned pale.

“Go on, sir; go on, sir,” she whispered.

“I had occasion,” the old man said, “some years ago, to examine the Bishops’ Bible of your husband’s church. I found it an extremely valuable and unusually beautiful specimen of the rare book. Some time ago Mr. Isaac Stringer” — a perceptible tremor ran through Mrs. Hay’s frame at the mention of the name — “wrote to the firm in London who employ me, for an expert opinion about the condition of that same Bible. You are not unwell, madam, I hope?”

“No, no; pray continue,” the poor lady answered.

“I am afraid my recital is trying to you,” Mr. White said “but there is no help for it. It is your right to know, and my duty to tell you. The Bishops’ Bible was again placed in my hands by Mr. Stringer after your husband had rescued it from the fire, and I find it to be a clever but worthless forgery.”

Mrs. Hay and Ophelia both rose in terror at the words.

“Those men! Those wicked men!” Mrs. Hay exclaimed, wringing her hands. “They have stolen the old book, and put this in its place, and —” She turned with ghastly open eyes and heaving bosom towards the old man, whilst her tears flowed fast. “Merciful Father!” she exclaimed. “I see it all now. That terrible man says my poor Denis has had a hand in it. May Heaven forgive him for the abominable thought!”

“I cannot conceal from you,” said the old gentleman

quietly, "that Mr. Stringer does charge your husband with complicity in the affair."

"What an outrage," exclaimed Ophelia. "What a wicked, dastardly outrage!"

"Reflections of this kind may ease your minds for the moment," the old scholar insisted kindly; "but they will not aid us in mending matters. You mentioned somebody just now — some men — and I gather from your remarks that they had something to do with the book. Believe me, you have my heartiest sympathy in this business, and you can command such aid as I can give you to the fullest of my power. Who are the men you spoke of just now, and what is their connection with the matter?"

"My husband engaged them to restore the book," Mrs. Hay answered. "The cover was broken, and the leaves were loose and soiled here and there, and a gentleman who came from London persuaded poor Denis to engage them. One was a Scotchman, the other a German."

"Thank you," Mr. White interrupted. "That is sufficient for my purpose. I know the pair, and have for some time past suspected them. Their names are Reinemann and MacWraith. The case is quite clear to me now, and I hope to make it clear to all concerned before I have done with it. Have no fear now, my dear madam," he said, rising. "I have a great deal of experience in the book business, and whilst rendering you and your husband a service which is due to you both, I hope to rid the community of a pair of rascals who have long been preying upon it. I return to London by the next train, and the first cab that I can find shall take me to Cholmondeley Rents, Chancery Lane. By

to-morrow morning at latest you shall know the result of my interview with Messieurs Reinemann and Mac-Wraith."

The pressure of a soft hand and a tearful glance thanked the old gentleman. His dignified and self-assured manner had carried such conviction with it, that Mrs. Hay, with all that additional trouble on her heart, felt actually lighter and happier in being aware of it.

Whilst the Rectory was thus sorrowfully disturbed, a crowd of gaping villagers surrounded the smouldering ruins of their parish church. The old Tudor walls stood there still, roofless and windowless, hollow shells of the destruction within. The surplices that had angered Mr. Stringer so sorely were gone, of course, and with them the presses which had contained them. Tiny columns of smoke curled from the heap of cinders, and the whole of God's acre and the road beyond the gate was strewed and blackened with extinguished embers. The village folk stood by, half surlily, half awe-stricken. Something had happened which they could not understand. There were those among them, of course, who were deeply dyed with the prejudices of the Stringer faction, and who traced the whole of this misfortune to what, in their minds, was the *fons et origo* of it all — the return to Papistry of the Established Church's minister. But by far the larger number among the little crowd listened to these perorations with about the intelligence and appreciation exhibited by a wooden doll that is addressed by a child. The whole business was a mix up of Rector, and churchwarden, and Bible, and church, and fire, and real book,

and wrong book, which was sorely perplexing to their dull minds. Somebody had changed something, and the fire was the result—that was as far as most of them got, until by sheer dint of hammering repetition, the opposition faction had made themselves understood so far as to convey to the most sluggish of them all that the Rector was even blacker than he had been painted.

Little knots of men and women were scattered over the churchyard and the road outside, and amongst these a town gentleman, no less a person than Mr. Cornelius Badger, moved in all the glory of his sham jewelry. He had the whole history of the affair at his fingers' ends. Looking upon himself as a possible future son-in-law of Mr. Isaac Stringer, he naturally espoused the latter's cause. He was holding forth to one and sundry in his most eloquent style, when he found himself tapped on the shoulder, and lo and behold! on turning round, there stood before him the burly and awe-inspiring form of Mr. Stringer himself.

Mr. Stringer was pale. His small hat was set firmly on his big head, his lips were bloodless, his teeth hard set, and there was a general air of quiet determination about his rotund face which made Mr. Cornelius Badger feel altogether uncomfortable. Mr. Badger noticed, with only half-assured satisfaction, that the father of his lady-love carried no horsewhip or other instrument of convenient torture with him. He suspected not for a moment that his epistle had been perused by the parental eye. He, therefore, took a little courage, and, although his heart went pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, his limbs shook somewhat less, and he felt himself prepared for nearly any emergency.

“I'm very much obliged to thee, young man,” Mr.

Stringer commenced, with threatening quiet, "for taking the trouble to speak up for me. I say I'm very much obliged to thee, because that about squares that matter; but I've got a word or two to say to you on the quiet, and, if you don't mind, I'll say it to you now. Who give you permission to write to my Mary?"

The thunderbolt had fallen at Mr. Badger's feet.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he stammered.

"Sorry be hanged!" Mr. Stringer rejoined. "Who give you permission?"

A small rat, previous to being eaten by a cat, and when being played with by his relentless enemy, could not feel more frightened than Mr. Badger under the threatening eye of the irate churchwarden. He fairly gasped.

"I thought, sir," was his reply, "as Miss Stringer, sir, if you please, sir, and you, sir —"

"Leave me out of the business, young man," Mr. Stringer protested. "Who give a young scamp like you, as come from nowhere, and as has nothing to recommend him, permission to write to a respectable girl — a respectable girl, I said — with a blameless character, and never known to hencourage a hunprincipled young man?"

Quite a crowd of listeners had surrounded the pair by that time.

Mr. Stringer was having a row with somebody, and that was always attractive sport to the young and old population of the village.

"Well, sir, I don't know, sir," Mr. Badger replied faintly.

"You don't know!" sneered Mr. Stringer. "Of course you don't know. You're not likely to know."

It's young scoundrels like you as brings desolation into Christian homes, and takes unsuspecting girls from their fathers, but you're not going to get so fur this time, Mr. Badger. My Mary's gone, and I don't care what becomes of her. I've done with her — but — ”

Mr. Badger did not wait to hear more. With a swift push of one elbow he sent a yokel who was standing by his side sprawling, an elderly woman experienced a similar fate, and Mr. Cornelius was speeding as fast as his legs could carry him towards the village, pursued by a small crowd of boys and men, who had heard in Mr. Stringer's speech sufficient warrant for a personal attack on the young man from town.

Mr. Badger was in a small way quite a bruiser. He was young, active, and not overburdened with flesh. Freed from the overawing presence of his possible father-in-law, he hit out right and left, and sent two or three of his aggressors flying into the dust of the road. The combat was too unequal, however, to be lengthy or undecided. Mr. Stringer, on coming up with Mr. Badger, beamed with satisfaction. There stood the graceless young man, a perfect wreck of destroyed grotesque finery — his coat torn, his hat, his cravat, and shirt nearly dragged from his body, all his clothing stained with dust and dirt, his hair dishevelled, and his face besmeared with blood.

“You'll write again to a respectable young girl, will you?” Mr. Stringer exclaimed; “and the next time you'll know what'll come to you. Let me give you one bit of advice, young man. You get out of this village as quick as your legs can carry you, or you'll see what can happen to you.”

Sufficient had already happened to Mr. Badger to im-

press him with a sense of the advisability of leaving the neighborhood. He scowled furiously out of his battered eyes upon the burly originator of his troubles, but dared utter no threat, nor even hint at intended revenge. The villagers were still there ready to spring at him like hounds loosened from the leash. The name of Mary Stringer was a household word amongst them, as the impersonation of all that was good and homely and lovable in a young girl. They had all known her from childhood, and they gleaned from Stringer's words that this young man had at least intended to bring her to destruction. Their fingers itched to fly at his throat again, and it was with difficulty that some of them could persuade themselves to allow Mr. Badger to slink away like a whipped cur.

Now, had this retribution not overtaken Mr. Badger, it is more than likely he would have remained in the village some considerable time longer, awaiting a reply to his letter to Mary. As it was, he changed his clothing, restored his disordered appearance as much as possible to its wonted gloss, and shook the dust of the village of Thorbury from his feet. The very next train took him on his road to London. At Birmingham a young lady who had been waiting on the platform, having arrived by a previous local train, took a seat in the compartment next to that occupied by Mr. Badger.

The young Lothario had been severely bruised in his contest with the villagers. His hurts, although not very apparent, caused him considerable pain. He gazed listlessly out into the great tumult of the busy station, and the young lady who stepped into the next compartment would have passed on her way unnoticed had she not asked the guard a commonplace question.

The sound of her voice rang through Mr. Badger. It electrified him and left him speechless for the moment. The young lady was Mary Stringer.

The whistle sounded and the train moved away — and Mr. Badger was relieved and gladdened by the thought that she for whom he had suffered so much was so near to him.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE train which stopped at Birmingham on its road to London, carrying the fortunes of Mr. Cornelius Badger and Miss Mary Stringer, had a third passenger of no little importance to our story — namely, Mr. Martin White. The old scholar had sent a telegraphic despatch to London, and had just returned to the platform, when he heard his name called by a gentleman standing at the door of one of the carriages of the local train proceeding northward.

“Oh, Saint Sauveur,” he said, “it is you. Let me see. Surely you live at Thorbury?”

“Yes,” replied the organist, “I am going back. I have been away for a few days, and would have been absent for another week, but there has been a fire in the church, and my friend Dr. Hay is injured.”

“I have just come from there,” White rejoined, “and I am running back to London on Dr. Hay’s business.”

“You have seen him?” Saint Sauveur asked. “There is nothing very serious, I hope?”

“I am not referring to the Doctor’s bodily condition — that is bad enough, I’m afraid — but he is in very good hands. Another matter of great importance has occurred. Of course you know all about the old Bishops’ Bible?”

“Yes,” Saint Sauveur answered eagerly. “Dr. Hay had it restored only lately. Your manner alarms me, White! There’s nothing wrong, I trust.”

"My dear boy," said the expert, "the book that was last night put in my hands is not the restored original. It is, to use a trade term, a faked fac-simile. A dastardly fraud has been committed, and there is a pig-headed fool in the village who insists upon dragging the name of our friend Dr. Hay into the charge."

"Mr. Stringer, I suppose?" Saint Sauveur exclaimed.

"The same," White replied. "He says he is sure Dr. Hay sold the old book, and had the imitation put in its place."

"But the man is mad! He must be mad!" cried the Frenchman. "He is more than mad: he is wicked. I never thought he would carry his spite so far. What can be done? Those men must have changed the book. I suppose they can be found."

"I am just going to London for the very purpose of fathoming this matter, and one of the first calls I shall make will be upon Messieurs Reinemann and MacWraith."

The bell for the departure of the down express sounded at that moment.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Saint Sauveur said excitedly. "I can be of no substantial service in Thorbury, and I might aid you considerably in London. I'll run back to town with you."

After a few words of explanation to the guard, Saint Sauveur's small luggage was transferred to the first-class compartment which White alone had previously occupied.

As the train was speeding Londonwards, the old expert opened his satchel, and produced from it quite a little pile of catalogues, lists of books, pamphlets, and other small publications issued by the book trade.

From these he selected a leaflet of four pages, which he handed to Saint Sauveur.

It was headed "William Hawkins' list of Photolithographic Fac-similes of Rare English Bibles, Psalters, etc."

"There you will find," Mr. White said, pointing to a place on the second page, "the publication which the blackguards used to make up the book at Thorbury. You see that six copies on vellum are advertised for sale, and at the office in Great Queen Street they will be able to tell us to whom each copy was sold, and we will thus be able to trace the fraud home."

"Of course we will," Saint Sauveur cried gleefully. "I suppose the rascals never dreamed that an expert would examine their book. Not many connoisseurs of bibliographic treasures come to the little village."

The journey to London proved an anxious period to Saint Sauveur, and he barely gave his companion time to call at his lodgings to leave his bag, before they were speeding as fast as a hansom could carry them towards Great Queen Street.

Over the broad doorway of a time-stained, sombre-looking building in that dingy thoroughfare, the word "Hawkins" shone in gilt letters from a black board.

If Mr. White and Saint Sauveur had not been so deeply occupied by the momentary excitement of the business in hand, they might have seen, as they passed through the gateway into the courtyard where the office was situated, a gentleman in shining black broadcloth, with sandy hair, and close-cropped beard and whisker, who was standing in a dark corner next to a staircase, having darted there the moment he saw White and Saint Sauveur alight.

“Ma gracious,” the black-broadclothed gentleman exclaimed when the two had passed him. “Ah’m a wee bet just in time. Saint Sauveur and White ! They’ve found out it’s a fake, and White will want to know who bought the fac-semele. They’ll just have a little trouble to find that out. Ah’d better go and tell Reinemann.”

With that he slunk away, and was soon lost amid the busy crowd of passers who thronged the street.

The expert was well known in the office, and was immediately ushered into the manager’s private room. The latter, a smooth-faced, elderly gentleman, soft and quiet in manner and speech, in compliance with White’s request, sent for the register of sales. A big ponderous volume was brought.

“We have sold four copies on vellum,” the smooth-faced gentleman said, on turning down one of the leaves. “One to the Liverpool Library, one to Mr. Quaritch, one to Mr. Anderton of New York, and one to the Rev. Dr. Denis Hay.”

At the mention of that name Saint Sauveur and White stood aghast, and neither of them seemed possessed of speech.

“Dr. Hay ! Dr. Hay !” Saint Sauveur burst out at last. “Why, it’s impossible !”

He looked from White to the manager, and from the manager to White, as if he were possessed by some horrid dream. He held on to a chair for a moment, and, gasping, sank into the seat.

“There is something very wrong about this transaction,” White said very quietly, “and I want you to give me all your attention. I am as certain as a man can be who has no absolute proof, that Dr. Hay did not buy this book.”

"My dear sir," the manager exclaimed, "what interest have we in entering Dr. Hay's name if it was not given to us as the purchaser?"

"May I look at the entry?" White asked pointedly, whilst Saint Sauveur, with a face pale and anxious, followed his movement as if barely awake.

The manager, for reply, swung round the big volume, so that the columns faced Mr. White.

"In whose handwriting is that entry?" the expert demanded.

The manager, looking at the writing through his eye-glasses, replied:

"It is the writing of one of our principal clerks." He stepped to the door of the glass partition which divided his room from the outer office. "Please come in here, Mr. Mackenzie," he called to a young man in the outer office. "I want you to explain something. Look at that entry — the last one — of the 1568 Bibles on vellum," he said, when the young man had entered. "That is your writing, is it not?"

"Yes, sir," the clerk replied.

"Was the book ordered by letter, or how?" the manager inquired.

The young man examined the entry, and replied sharply:

"No. It was sold across the counter. You see the little C before the entry, which means 'cash.'"

Both Saint Sauveur and White had been listening attentively.

"Can you describe the person who bought the book?" Saint Sauveur asked in a troubled voice.

"I have no particular memory of the transaction," the clerk answered.

"Do you remember at all how you came to enter it to Dr. Hay?" the manager inquired.

"I will ask Charles," the clerk replied. "He took the money, and may have a better recollection of the business than I."

The clerk stepped into the outer office, and the seconds appeared years to Saint Sauveur before he returned.

"Charles remembers the circumstance perfectly," the young man said when he re-entered the room, "although he does not remember the actual person. It was an ordinary messenger, and on Charles asking him to whom the invoice was to be made out, he gave the Rev. Dr. Hay's name and address."

"That is all you can tell us about the matter?" Saint Sauveur asked disconsolately.

"I don't know what else I can tell you, sir," the clerk answered, and left the room.

"We have found but poor consolation here," Saint Sauveur said when they were in the street again. "This but makes the matter worse."

"That is MacWraith's trick, I'll bet," said White. "Reinemann is neither cunning enough nor clever enough for such a dodge. We must treat the serpents after their own fashion. Of course, it was absurdly impossible for them to substitute a forgery for the real book without possessing themselves of a ready-made imitation, and, unfortunately, in Hawkins' list they found one of these. We must pretend to be totally unaware of this purchase of theirs, and the use they made of Dr. Hay's name."

Cholmondeley Rents is a narrow passage leading from Lincoln's Inn to Chancery Lane. It is composed of

about twenty tumble-down, ill-looking buildings, often with dingy, unclean, paper-mended windows, and principally occupied by law-stationers, law-writers, lithographers, brokers, and other dependents of the law courts, with the inevitable disreputable-looking coffee-house and the equally inevitable worse-looking beer-shop at either end.

The ground-floor of one of these houses was occupied by an office, on the white stippled window of which appeared, in large black letters, the name "L. Reinemann," and, much smaller, underneath, the word "MacWraith." The entrance to the office was by a door at the side, the big iron knocker of which had to give its summons thrice before an answer was made to the call.

A diminutive boy, whose face looked like one big smudge, inquired in a shrill treble, "What did the gentlemen want?" On being told that the gentlemen wished to see either Mr. Reinemann or Mr. MacWraith, the diminutive boy slammed the door, and shouted, "Wait a minute," through the keyhole.

Saint Sauveur and White waited several minutes before the door opened again, and the small smudge-faced boy, pointing to the office with a "Will the gentlemen step in there, please?" grinned as if something very peculiar had tickled his risible faculties, and, diving into the gloom of the landing, disappeared like a shot, whilst his boots could be heard going clatter, clatter upstairs.

The organist and expert, on entering the office, found themselves in a large room with perfectly bare walls, the entire furniture of which consisted of an immense plain deal table and three heavy stools. A couple of big ink-stands stood upon the black-bespattered table, and some

sheets of red blotting-paper lay strewn about it here and there. In one corner stood a huge basket filled with paper cuttings, parchment cuttings, and loose leaves of all kinds, and there was a general air of untidiness about the place which it would have seemed difficult to obtain with so small an amount of articles.

They might have waited in that office a full five minutes when the descending clatter of the small boy's big boots again became audible. A door opened in the back regions of the office, and a dirty little face peeped in, hailing them with :

“This way please, gennelmen.”

They obeyed the behest and followed their guide upstairs. Mr. MacWraith was waiting for them on the landing, with a vitriolic smile on his vitriol-creaming face.

“Ah'm very sorry,” he said, “to have kept ye waiting, but ma partner and I have had to finish a job — a most emportant job — and we have just got it off in time and no more. Glad to see ye, Mr. Saint Sauveur,” he added, with a sardonic grin. “I hope Dr. Hay is well. Anything we can do for ye?”

The senior partner was sitting in a wooden Bristol armchair, pulling at his black mustache, and elevating his black eyebrows as if he desired to get his features into a convenient shape.

“We have come to ask a few questions, which I trust you will answer explicitly,” said the expert. “My name is White — Martin White. I suppose you have heard my name?”

“Ah have that honor,” Mr. MacWraith replied. “Proud and happy to see ye in this humble place. We're both proud and happy — aren't we, Reinemann?”

"Wery broud," the adipose German ejaculated curtly, still twisting and twirling his mustache.

"I want you to tell me," the old scholar said, fixing his cold steady look upon the Scotchman, who withered under it, "what has become of the 1568 folio vellum Bible which Dr. Hay entrusted to your care."

"What has become of it?" MacWraith exclaimed. "It's at Thorbury, of course."

"Don't play with me," the expert continued quietly. "You will be wise in your generation if you make a clean breast of this affair. The book at Thorbury is a Hawkins' fac-simile."

"Quite so, quite so," MacWraith answered in the most commonplace tone in the world. "To what are ye alluding?"

Reinemann continued to twist and twirl his mustache, but much more rapidly and nervously than before.

"What do you mean by 'quite so'?" White asked, with the barest trace of irritation audible in his voice.

"Ah mean what ye said just now," MacWraith replied grimly and dryly. "Ah mean that it is a Hawkins' fac-semele."

"Great heavens alive, man!" White exclaimed in amazement. "Do you mean to say that you confess it?"

"Confess it?" MacWraith cried, with well-assumed astonishment. "Confess what?"

He turned to Reinemann, rolling his brownish eyes all over the room as if in search of an imaginary fault.

"What have we to confess, Reinemann?" he asked.

The German shrugged his big shoulders. He shook his upstanding mop of black hair, and uttered a disconsolate:

"Yes; what hafe ve to confess?"

White was a scholar and a book-worm, whose habits of life were of that quiet and even kind which peculiarly unfitted him for a struggle with the oily and snaky Mr. MacWraith. The old gentleman's temper was getting the better, or rather the worse, of him, although for the moment he took pains not to show it. He knew that he was dealing with a scoundrel, but as yet had no idea of the consummate rascality which he would have to encounter.

"I wish you, sir, to be explicit," he said sternly. "You told us just now that you knew that the book at Thorbury is a Hawkins' fac-simile."

"Quite so, quite so," the Scotchman again replied.

White heaved a long breath, as if for the moment undecided how to proceed.

"And will you tell me, sirs," the expert proceeded, looking from MacWraith to Reinemann and from Reinemann to MacWraith, "what you have done with the original vellum copy?"

"The oreginal? It's the oreginal ye're asking aboot?" answered Mr. MacWraith, with a diabolic smile which nearly degenerated into a grin. "Ah don't know what Dr. Hay's done with it. Did he tell ye, Reinemann?"

The German, with his elbows on the table in front of him, still pulling away at his mustache, simply grunted, —

"No."

"Will you permit me to ask a question?" Saint Sauveur now chimed in. "Do I understand you to say you acknowledge the book now at Thorbury to be a fac-simile?"

Mr. MacWraith made a very fair pretence of being upon the point of losing patience.

"Ye're takin' up a lot of our time, gentlemen," he exclaimed, "in askin' questions Ah've answered over and over again. Ah've told ye that the book is a fac-semele. Dr. Hay asked us to make one to put it into the church, and what he's done with the oreginal Ah don't know, nor was it my business to ask. Now, if there's nothing else ye want me to tell ye, with your permission, Ah'll say good-afternoon."

Saint Sauveur rose with an honest fury surging to his throat. He would have dearly liked to grip the scoundrel, and to drag the living truth from him. He felt sure of the villainy which had been perpetrated. But how was he to prove it? How was he to contradict the barefaced wretches?

"Let us go, Mr. White," he said, suppressing his emotion; then, turning to the two partners, he added, — "I am not experienced enough in trickery such as yours to be likely to be successful in obtaining from you a truthful statement, but this I will say, and will stand by my words, that you have committed a deliberate fraud, and that you are attempting to shift the onus from your own shoulders by abominable lies."

The German had risen in a make-believe of a towering rage.

"Sar," he shouted, "if you say dat again —"

"Quiet. Easy does it," his partner stopped him. Then, with a grotesque attempt at dignity, he turned to White and Saint Sauveur. "There's a law in the land, and Ah'll mek ye prove your words."

"You may rest assured that I will," Saint Sauveur replied sternly. "There is a law in the land, and a police as well, and you shall have your fill of both."

"Dat vas a masderly idea of yours!" Reinemann

exclaimed when Saint Sauveur and White were gone. "Quide a Naboleonic business. But Naboleon had his Vaterloo, and I don't vant my Newgate. So if you vant to write to me do-morrow, my address is 14 Burschen Strasse, Leipzig, and I can find a room for you dere as vell."

"It's off for the Fatherland, then?" the Scotchman asked.

"Yes," Reinemann replied. "Dey might come again do-morrow, and bring odder beoble mit dem, and dey might be bolice. Danke schön!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

MR. STRINGER followed the discomfited Don Juan of the oiled locks and the cheap jewelry — now, alas! so shorn of his gloss — and saw him enter his lodging over the little cobbler's stall, a few doors from the village inn. A very brief interview with the cobbler proved to him that Mr. Badger was packing up his traps, and the churchwarden sauntered back to his house with, for him, an unusually listless step. The elasticity was gone from his movements; his small hat gyrated but mournfully upon his big head — it was more restless than before, and either Mr. Stringer's efforts were less energetic than usual, or he had momentarily lost the knack of the thing, for the offending head-gear bounced away into freedom; and Mr. Stringer had to run after it, catch it, and replace it in a spirit far removed from graciousness. Mr. Stringer was sullen and silent with himself. Having nobody with whom he might be displeased ready to his hand, he made a scapegoat for himself of his own individuality. He could not have been in a worse temper with, or more offensively inclined towards, Mary than he felt towards himself at that moment; and yet he looked upon himself as the most injured of mortals all the while.

He took the Bible and the certificate from the drawer in the sideboard, in which he had locked it the previous night. His movements were quite mechanical, slow and measured, like some clockwork set in motion by inadvertent touch.

The daylight showed to him the stains of soil and smoke on the cover of the book, and without knowing exactly what he did, he took out his pocket-handkerchief, and commenced to rub the old leather-covered oak boards with it, muttering, "Mary! Mary! Mary!" a full dozen times. He had made up his mind to be the Roman father. He had played the part well enough when Joseph left him, and he had started pretty fairly in the impersonation when the first news of Mary's flight came to him in that note; but somehow or other it did not seem quite so easy when Mary was concerned as when Joseph was the culprit. A dozen little things about the room, standing in a dozen places — things which she had handled, things which she had touched, which had belonged to her, which she had given him, all spelled her name. Look where he might, turn where he would, Mary was ever present. Her soft face looked at him pleadingly. The place was full of her, and yet so lonely because she was not there. He seemed to hear her voice, and yet the room was silent, dreary, and unhomelike. This was his home now. These walls, and the ceilings, and the floors and the furniture.

He bit his lip, and sat himself down in the big chintz-covered armchair, stretching his legs as far as they would reach, and staring out in front of him. He had only done his duty, that he knew. His intentions had been of the best. He might have been a little rough with her sometimes, perhaps just a trifle too rough; but then he only meant it for her good. He never meant her any harm, and she ought to have known that, and she ought not to have run away. Really she ought not to have left him.

But he was not going to stir a finger to call her

back. If she was so undutiful, so ungrateful, so unchildlike as not to care what became of him, nor how miserable he was at that moment, she might go her way. In the service of others she would soon find out the difference between a home such as his and a place to live in. But she would come back. Yes, he felt sure she would come back. Not by his calling, though. He would never stoop to that. He would never beg one of his children — of his undutiful children, of his disobedient children — to return to him. But she would come back, nevertheless — that he knew — and would make the place homelike and homely again.

From where he sat his eye rested on a square piece of cream-colored canvas, which Mary's nimble fingers had begun to transform into an embroidered cover for a sofa-cushion. The variegated green and brown leaves, and the poppy-red roses, stared at him from a brown ground. They fidgeted him, and worried him, and he arose slowly and solemnly to remove the thing. As he held it between his fingers it seemed that by touching the object which she had touched he was nearer her. His limbs began to tremble, and he felt much less stout at heart than he had ever done before. His throat became thirsty and dry, and his eyes dim and weak, and he dashed the embroidered canvas on the ground with a half-stifled cry. He stood looking at it as it lay at his feet for a full minute, silent and unthinking, with vacant mind and gaze. Then he stooped and picked it up. He carried it to the sideboard drawer, whence he had just taken the Holy Book, and casting a final glance upon it, closed the drawer.

He wrapped the Bible in an old newspaper, and tied a dilapidated and joined piece of string around it. Had

he been an imaginative man, he might have seen the very picture of his mind in that piece of string. The autumn sky, which had previously been dull and gray, had become leaden, and a fine drizzle was abroad in the air. Nature had assumed an aspect as uncomfortable as his own hearth, and seemed to be in league with all the rest of the world to make him miserable. But he was not to be thus beaten by the weather, or an undutiful daughter either. The great, old, dark-brown alpaca umbrella, with the huge whalebone ribs, was there ready for duty; and the disconsolate churchwarden set out towards Thorbury Chase with the feeling of a man who is called upon to pose as a hero to the world, but who does not feel a bit heroic.

The fine, imperceptible drizzle had settled itself into what a Scotchman would call a "wee bet o' mist." Everybody knows the story of that English sportsman who was kept within doors by the most persistent of downpours, and who, on asking his keeper if he thought the weather would change, received the reply that most likely it would turn to rain. Mr. Stringer had not been on the road ten minutes before that Scotch mist did turn to rain, and he soon became, the big umbrella notwithstanding, a miserable soaked object in a miserable soaked landscape. He had made up his mind, however, to see the Squire, and he was as doggedly determined in that as in everything else.

When he reached Thorbury Chase his trousers looked as though they had been in a bath. The drippings of his umbrella had descended down his broad back in rivers, and had traced their course down to his drenched coat-tails. The sneaking element had insinuated itself beneath his cuffs; it had sprinkled itself in a perfect

hoar-frost over his gymnastic hat and his face, and his collar was limp and moist with it. The newspaper in which he had wrapped the Bible had become a mere disreputable wet rag, and the black corners of the leather-covered boards stood out sharp beyond the grayish paper. He felt as woe-begone when he entered the library of Thorbury Chase, having left his dripping umbrella and head-gear in charge of a servant, as if he were a mendicant, and dreaded to be sent away hungry and empty-handed.

"You made a fine idiot of yourself last night, Stringer," Mr. Boyer said when he entered the room. "I shouldn't have thought it of you. Every man has a right to his own opinions; but no man has a right to use them to his neighbor's spiteful damage on a mere assumption."

Of all men Stringer felt himself the most injured. But the proofs of the justice of his case were there beneath his hand, and he waited silently and stolidly, chewing an imaginary cud, and looking as unhappy as any man could.

"You see what it has brought about," the Squire continued — "your confounded meddling with things you don't understand. I've no patience with you. You take an idea into that thick head of yours, and nobody can knock it out of you. I told you you were a fool about that book, and now that poor Dr. Hay has been half killed I suppose you're sorry for it — drat it, man! say you're sorry for it, even if you don't mean it."

"I'm not sorry, Squire," Stringer replied in a woe-begone voice.

"Not sorry," the fox-colored Squire roared; "not

sorry! Why, what further mischief do you want to do? Be a man, and when you've committed a fault confess it like a man."

"I've done nothing as I need be ashamed on," Stringer replied, sluggishly rubbing the moisture from his garments; "and I've done no harm to nobody as they didn't deserve, and as it wasn't my dewty to do."

"By heavens!" the Squire exclaimed, getting red in the face, "you would make a saint swear. Your duty! rubbish! Mischievous meddling. I'm no friend of Dr. Hay's. You know that. But I make bold to say that what you did last night was a shame to any decent man in any decent parish."

Stringer took out a small pocket-knife, and cut the twine by which the Bible was tied up. He crumpled the string and the wet paper into a ball, which he threw into the fireplace.

"Look theer!" he said, pointing to the book.

"Oh, you've got it?" Boyer asked. "What of it? what about it?"

"Look theer?" Stringer again said, as quietly as before.

He opened the book, and held out the expert's certificate.

Boyer took it, and glanced over it.

"That's a bad job," he said, "a very bad job. But what does it prove?"

"It proves that the book's a forgery, don't it?" Stringer inquired.

"Well, and what then?" Boyer asked. "What has that got to do with your charge against Dr. Hay?"

"Th' other book was worth some hunderds of pounds," Stringer rejoined, "and this one ain't worth

a fiver. And who's had the difference o' the money if the Rector hasn't? — that's what I want to know."

"My good Stringer," the Squire replied, "your charge against the Rector would be a terrible one if it were not so preposterous. You dislike the man, and you see something wrong in everything he does. But your present idea is simply silly. If the man had known that this book was not the genuine old Bible, he would never have risked his life in saving it. Now, try and hammer that into your head."

For the first time Stringer saw the Rector's action by a new light. The Squire was likely to be right in what he said, and he, Stringer, perhaps had been a little hasty. But then, on the other hand, that was only a surmise, and he had no actual proof of it. Therefore, why should he say off-hand that he believed it to be true? Not he. Why should he believe it to be true at all without final and conclusive proof? It was not a case in which a man ought to have the benefit of a doubt. All the Rector's actions had been suspicious, and more or less illegal, and in defiance of the established practices of the Church; therefore, why should he trust him on a mere surmise?

"You're too good-natured, Squire," he said, "and too easy. I'm quite willin' to be guided by you, but a man's got a right to his own opinion all the same, and until it's shown how this here rubbishy book was put in the place of th' ode Bible, what's been in the church all these years, and until it's proved that man alive could do it without the Rector knowin' of it, and being a party to it, by your leave, Squire, I'll say that my opinion's worth yourn, and that I've got as much right to mine as you've to yours."

"You were always pig-headed," Boyer exclaimed; "and there's no hope of moving you when you've once got a thing in your noddle."

"There's a pair on us, then," Stringer answered. "All I come for is to leave this book with you to take charge on. You're a magistrate as well as Squire of the parish."

"As you like, Stringer," said Boyer casually. "It can make no difference to anybody. But you're not going back in this beastly weather, are you? You're wet through. I'll send for a drop of port."

He rang the bell, and the servant brought the wine.

"Do you know, Squire," said Stringer sorrowfully, as he sipped at his glass, "my Mary's run away this morning."

"Your Mary!" exclaimed the other. "Why, then both your children are gone."

"Yes," said Stringer. "They're both gone."

He put down the glass he held in his hand.

Boyer looked at him strangely.

"Your house is very lonely, I suppose?" he said in a low voice.

Stringer nodded his head in silence.

"Those children do make one's home bright, when they're about," the Squire continued. "Don't they?"

Stringer again nodded his head, but said nothing.

"Both yours are gone, then," Boyer said. His speech was as soft as a woman's. One would scarcely have credited him with so much tenderness. "I often feel sorry my boy's gone," he continued, "and I miss him so. I suppose it's the same with you?"

The two obstinate fathers looked at one another for a few moments in silence.

Then the Squire held out his hand, and Stringer grasped it, and shook it heartily, but neither of them spoke a word.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE only person who profited, or thought he profited, by the chapter of accidents — each particular incident so weighty in itself — which had proved so momentous to the usually peaceful village of Thorbury, was, without doubt, the individual least worthy of Fortune's favors. Mr. Cornelius Badger was highly elated by the circumstance which had located him in such close vicinity to Miss Mary Stringer. The rumbling and rolling of the train, the continuous swish and whirr of the wheels, the noise of the wind as the train dashed through it, all became blended into glad music for his lovelorn soul. The rainy landscape through which they rushed, the gray, leaden sky, the dripping trees, and the uncomfortably soaked village gardens became bright and cheerful to him as he warmed himself by the sunshine of Miss Mary's near presence.

When the express stopped at Rugby, he jumped from his carriage, and paraded the platform in front of Mary's window, in the hope that he might attract her attention, and that she might see him and speak to him. It was love's labor lost, for Miss Stringer gave no sign of existence. A buxom Staffordshire widow and her two noisy children filled with their obnoxious presence the windows of the compartment, and it was impossible for Mr. Badger to obtain a glimpse of the Thorbury churchwarden's daughter, crane his neck as ever he might. A gruff and surly porter ordered him into his carriage

in the tone of command and contempt often shown towards meaner travellers by provincial railway officials. Mr. Cornelius obeyed hesitatingly, and grumblingly, and a moment afterwards was again whisked along the iron road to London.

The compartment in which he sat was nearly full. A woman suckling a baby was Mr. Badger's immediate neighbor, and opposite him sat two militiamen, not too sober, nor too peacefully inclined. They had attempted in the short journey between Birmingham and Rugby to pick a quarrel with a quiet, stolid-looking, burly farmer, who sat at the farther end of the carriage, and, in the course of a short argument, had threatened to punch the latter's head. When, however, the farmer rose, and did not finish rising until he stood as high as the carriage itself, and when they noticed the splendid breadth of his chest and shoulders, their pugnacious valor vanished as if by magic, and they contented themselves with making the place a pandemonium of oaths and vulgar language. Annoyed by the fact that they could not wreak vengeance on the stalwart yeoman, they looked about for a more likely victim of their prowess, and one was ready to their hands in the Thorbury Lovelace. A pretext was easily found when Mr. Badger, on re-entering the compartment, unwittingly stepped upon one of the militiamen's toes. The profusest apologies, the most humiliating acknowledgments of his carelessness, availed not to save the already battered young man from further castigation. A cowardly attack was made upon him while he was in the act of placing his hat in the rack. The woman, seeing poor Cornelius thus viciously assailed by two men, both of them his superiors in weight and strength, put her head out of the window and shouted and screamed at the top of her voice.

The sudden grating sound of the brakes, as the train came to an abrupt standstill, brought the two ruffians to a sense of their conduct, and they sat down, scowling at poor Cornelius, whose face was streaming with blood.

The guard appeared at the door a moment afterwards, and amidst a perfect Babel of voices, in which the woman and the baby joined vigorously, the position of affairs was explained. Placed between the alternative of having to expel the two militiamen *manu militari*, and that of finding a place of safety and peace for Mr. Badger, the guard invited the latter to take his seat in another compartment. Here, again, Fortune favored the apparently luckless one. Twice that day had he suffered, twice had he been assaulted, beaten, and outraged; but each instance of pain and discomfort had brought him nearer to his goal.

The guard opened the very next compartment, and Mr. Badger, with his swollen and wounded face half concealed by a handkerchief, found himself seated next to Mary, before either he or she was aware of one another's presence or identity. The whole stoppage had barely occupied a minute, and had passed unnoticed by those passengers who were not immediate witnesses of its cause.

Now the Don Juan of the imitation jewelry had certainly lost his gloss in Miss Mary's fancy. She could not help remembering the stern fact that he was the prime cause of her leaving home and father. Yet the girl's mind was still saturated with the thought that he was quite as innocent as she. She had been brought up in the strictest principles of Puritan simplicity by an uncompromising parent, and had long been left without a mother who might have warned her against the wiles

and ways of a wicked world. Suspicion of deceit and untruth was therefore as much a stranger to Mary's mind as the actual vices were to her own character. Mr. Badger had paid attentions to her. Other girls of Thorbury, virtuous girls, had received similar courtesies with the full consent of their parents. A still, small voice in Mary's bosom told her that that was just the difference — those words "with the consent" — but she strengthened herself with the assurance that she would have told her father everything had he appeared less hard and unkind.

She was going to London. Mrs. Noble lived there. Mrs. Noble was an elderly woman who had been as good as a mother to Mary after her own mother's death. She had been Stringer's housekeeper until the latter's now well-defined idiosyncrasies drove her away. The homely and kind-hearted old woman had often prophesied that the pig-headed churchwarden would drive his children to seek a refuge among strangers, and as a sort of emphasis of her Sibylline faculty, she had told Mary, in Stringer's own presence, that whenever she wanted a home outside of Thorbury, she would find one with her, Grannie Noble.

Grannie Mag, as she was most often called, kept a small shop in Marlborough Road, Chelsea, a busy thoroughfare principally occupied by sellers of cheap second-hand furniture and similar commodities. Her letters to Mary were written on note-paper bearing the lithographed heading "The People's Emporium." Mary, remembering with something like awe a huge establishment in Birmingham similarly named, felt safe in trusting herself to Grannie Noble's care and guidance. She had saved up sufficient pocket-money to be sure of being

able to pay her way for a couple of months at least whilst looking for a situation as parlor-maid or lady's maid. She knew that she could get a good character from the housekeeper at the Chase. Before leaving Thorbury she had written a long letter to the old lady explaining to her why she had left her home. She was sure of protection from that quarter, and thereby felt herself armed to face the battle of life.

All thought of Mr. Badger had faded from her mind, and she was occupied in forming plans for the immediate future, when the door of her compartment opened and the damaged Cornelius made his hurried entrance. In the dim light which prevailed in the carriage, she thought, first of all, that some inebriated person had been thrust in to take his place by her side, and she bridled up at the idea. A furtive glance soon proved to her, however, that the new-comer was more an object of pity than of repugnance. When she discovered who he really was, her feelings were of that mixed kind which is the invariable result of crowding a great many things into one little mind. Mary did not know whether to feel annoyed at meeting Mr. Badger so soon again, or to be glad that she was there, able to comfort him in his distress. He was hurt, sorely, that she could see, and — such is the perversity of maidenly reasoning — in the same flash of time she felt sure that he was hurt unjustly. The natural result of this self-argument was to dispel the reserve she would, under all other circumstances, have shown, had Mr. Badger again approached her of his own accord. Had the young man simply met her when the train stopped in London, his politest of bows and his oiliest of graces would have proved so much water on a duck's back. He would

have been repaid with the frigid acknowledgment of his courtesy, and Mary would have passed on her way, and would most probably forever have escaped Mr. Cornelius's pursuit. But Fate ordained it otherwise, for, surely, Mary could not possibly be cold and distant to him when she saw him before her in his pitiable plight.

Now, Mr. Badger was neither a clever young man nor a student of nature, but he knew that pity is ever latent in the female breast. With the cunning which is an equal attribute of the monkey, the lunatic, and the blackleg, he was possessed of a certain amount of quick perception, and that quality spurred him to attack Mary where her armor was most vulnerable. She pitied him — lucky dog he thought himself to be so pitied — for that was already a step in the right direction. With voluble tongue he gave a description of his woes; embellished his statement with adjective and adverb prettily chosen to catch the hearer's sympathy. He told her of the assault committed upon him at Thorbury, but he blamed not Miss Stringer's highly respected father, not he. It was his, Mr. Badger's, unmerited misfortune to have his, Mr. Badger's, honorable intentions so undeservedly and completely misunderstood by Mr. Stringer. He was doubly sorry, he was more sorry than he knew how to express, at the surprising discovery that Miss Stringer had left the parental roof. As to his hurts they were nothing — mere scratches. His only sorrow was that, by their means, he had not been able to be of service to Miss Stringer.

In the ordinary sequence of circumstances, even had the course of his true love run perfectly smooth, Mr. Badger could not have hoped to find himself *tête-à-tête* with her whom he loved, for a long time to come.

Here she was by his side, actually listening with attentive ears to his recital. The little hands twitched nervously, and the large gray eyes looked at him sympathetically, so that pain and wounds were speedily forgotten. Mary's own nimble fingers helped him to rearrange his disordered necktie. Mary's best efforts were wasted in busy attempts to restore the sheen to his battered hat, and long before London was approached, Mr. Badger was perfectly cognizant of Mrs. Noble's address and the girl's intentions regarding the future.

When the London ticket platform was reached, Mr. Cornelius was rather glad than otherwise on being informed that his aggressors had decamped during one of the stoppages of the train. His fear all along had been that he would have to accompany the officers who would take the militiamen into custody, and that he would thus be unable to say good-by to Mary with anything like proper effect. Vindictiveness fought with self-interest in his bosom, and was vanquished, though not without a severe struggle. But he was in luck's way that day — all incidents seemed to shape themselves, in the end, to his favor.

There was a perfect sea of faces on the Euston platform. A popular politician had been travelling by the train, and the station was crowded with his enthusiastic adherents. Among that hurrying, pushing, shouting, swaying mass, Mary sought with anxious eyes her brother, whom she had asked by telegraph to meet her at the station. Luckily for her, Joseph wore Her Majesty's livery, and the brilliant red of his jacket shone amid the gray, brown, and black surging hive like a solitary poppy in a green corn-field. Joseph, looking

over the heads and hats of most of the crowd that surrounded him, had his attention attracted by the energetic waving of Mary's parasol, and swiftly shouldered his way to the spot whence his sister nervously sought his assistance.

"So he's druv you away as he did me," was the first brotherly greeting Mary received. "I knew it would come, I did. I am glad to see you, Mary, though I ain't glad in another way. Come now, let's wake up! Where's your box? Mrs. Noble's waiting in a cab outside the station."

Mary had to confess with blushes that her worldly possessions were contained in an old carpet bag and divers paper parcels. Never having dreamed that she would have to leave her father's house, she had not provided herself with a travelling-box.

Mr. Corney Badger had vainly endeavored to show himself to his friend, Mr. Joseph Stringer, and his efforts were only rewarded by success when the life-guardsman, with a great parcel under each arm, and a carpet-bag dangling from one hand, turned to inform his sister that everything was ready.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. The phrase was a favorite one with his officers, and he naturally imitated his superiors. "If it ain't Corney! Why, old chap, you have been goin' it! Who's been makin' a drumhead of your face? There'll be a rise in the price of raw steak when *you* get to Knightsbridge. Why, and, as I think of it, are you with Mary or is Mary with you?" With this he gave a long whistle. "Come now," he added; "own up, Mister Corney; which is it?"

Mary blushed at her brother's speech, and drew herself up indignantly.

"I'm ashamed of you, Joe," she said haughtily; "Mr. Badger is not with me, and I'm not with him. Mr. Badger met me in the train. Some spiteful men assaulted him, and the guard put him into my compartment, and to show you that I'm not with Mr. Badger, I will, with your leave, say good-by to him now. Good-by to you, sir," she said, extending a gloved hand, and bowing with a countrified courtesy.

The furious glance which Mr. Corney shot sideways at his friend Joseph convinced the latter that — to use a term of his own phraseology — he had put his foot in it. The unsophisticated guardsman saw nothing improper in a little harmless flirtation, and if Mr. Cornelius Badger courted Mary — honorably, of course — Joseph was quite ready and quite willing to assist him on his way. That Mr. Cornelius could be capable of acting otherwise than straightforwardly was a supposition that never entered Joseph's mind. He was therefore rather sorry that he had — to use again his own style of language — put a spoke into Mr. Badger's wheel.

For the latter, there was no alternative but to accept the inevitable. He would have dearly liked to be so favored as to be allowed to accompany Mary on her journey Fulhamwards.

"I hope Miss Stringer isn't offended with me," he said, bowing his politest, "for I'd take my davy afore a judge an' jury as such a hidea never entered my mind. Miss Stringer is ashamed of you, Joe, and so am I."

The air of injured innocence sat so defiantly on his bruised and swollen face, that Mary felt some misgiving lest she had treated Mr. Badger too harshly. There was just a little unconscious flutter at her heart as she

thought that perhaps she might never see the young man again. She might have softened, and spoken a kindlier word, had not Grannie Noble at that very moment appeared upon the scene and thrown her arms fervently round Mary's neck. In the midst of that hugging, and that kissing, and those tears of welcome, wiped away on the one hand with a smudgy handkerchief, and on the other with clean cambric, Mr. Badger, his griefs, his hopes, and his personality were utterly forgotten, and when the four-wheeler containing Mary, her fortunes, and her friends rolled cumbrously towards the Fulham Road, Mr. Corney stowed himself and his box into a hansom. He was not in a pleasant mood, but he felt relieved by the thought that Mrs. Noble's address was engraven upon his memory in indelible characters.

CHAPTER XX.

JOSEPH STRINGER sat next to the driver on the box of the vehicle which carried Mary towards the Marlborough Road. His legs were too long to be distributed comfortably among the various parcels and other articles which encumbered the seats. In addition to that, Trooper Joseph was much addicted to the use of the weed, and having invested two copper presentments of her Majesty in the purchase of two vile cigars, he longed for the quiet enjoyment of his favorite luxury. Grannie Noble objected to smoking. Mary also would have probably entered her protest against the lighted cigar. Joseph was glad, therefore, of the liberty which the limited space at his disposal by the cabman's side afforded him.

At the corner of Piccadilly the "growler" was stopped in the midst of the surging traffic. A perfect flood of cabs, carriages, omnibuses, and carts, crested by bobbing human heads, impeded further progress, and Joe was compelled to wile away a minute in furtive and necessarily futile attempts to kick over a lamp-post.

While engaged in this not very exhilarating pastime, Trooper Stringer heard his name called, and looking up, or rather down, found himself addressed by no less a personage than Frank Boyer.

"What are *you* doing up there, Joseph?" inquired the Squire's son with a friendly smile. "On guard, eh!"

"Glad to see you, Mr. Frank," replied Joseph. "Mary's inside," he added. "Father's druv her away from home, as he did me."

"I am sorry to hear that," exclaimed Frank.

He rapped at the closed window of the cab. Mrs. Noble, suddenly recognizing the son of the lord of Thorbury Chase, hastened to let down the glass partition. She made various attempts at a courtesy, and failing in these through the insufficiency of room, she extended a fat hand of welcome.

"I am sorry to hear you have had to leave Thorbury," said Frank, addressing Mary, who blushed in crimson confusion. "It seems things did not go very smoothly at home. I know what that means. I have felt it for a long while now, and felt it bitterly. You are better off than I am, though, for you have got a dear, good old friend with you. You could not be better cared for anywhere than you'll be with Mrs. Noble."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Frank," said the old woman, wiping a round and shining face. She was always perspiring, more or less, and the slightest excitement put her into febrile heat.

"Anything new at Thorbury?" inquired young Boyer. "I have had no news from the village or any one in it — my father included — these days past. How is — oh, I forgot you are not very great friends with them — at least your father is not. But you are sure to know, all the same." He hesitated for a moment, and then continued: "How is Dr. Hay, and Mrs. Hay" — another slight pause — "and Miss Hay?"

"Haven't you heard?" ejaculated Mary. "But of course you couldn't very well know so soon. Thorbury Church was burned down last night, and they say —"

She stopped herself as she saw that the young man's face had gone white.

"What's the matter with you, Mr. Frank?" she asked. "You are not ill, are you?"

"Oh, it's nothing," Frank replied. "Nothing has happened to —" he inquired anxiously, to —?"

"They did say at the village that the Rector was hurt at the fire. Some of them said that he was rather badly hurt."

At that moment the cab moved onwards, carried along in the tide of the traffic, and Mary, looking back out of the window, saw young Boyer force his way through the crowd on the pavement and rush across the road. He had not even said good-day.

The news had, indeed, made a strong impression upon Frank. With the thought of Ophelia, and of her probable trouble, in his mind, he did not hesitate for an instant. He raced to his chambers, and less than an hour afterwards the evening express carried him towards the midlands.

It was nigh on midnight when the last local train, much behind its time, steamed up to Thorbury Station. Half a mile to the west the village lay hushed in sleep. The only two persons who alighted from the train, besides Frank — an old man who kept a small haberdasher's and hosier's shop, and a groom in the service of a gentleman in the neighborhood — after respectfully saluting Frank, disappeared in the night. They, as well as the solitary porter, were well aware of the Squire's quarrel with his son. The old railway porter's cheery "Haven't seen you for a long time, Mr. Frank: glad to see you again," sounded like a pleasant omen to the anxious one. He left his portmanteau and valise

in charge of the station servant, who promised to deliver it safely at the Fox and Dogs, and sauntered out into the black and lonely road which led to the village.

In the distance beyond a light gleamed here and there between the trees. Further out still, to the right, the young man espied two tiny fiery specks, twinkling like twin stars. Near them was his hope, his love, for they were the lights of Thorbury Rectory. His pulse beat faster and his throat became dry as he communed with himself as to whether or not he dared knock at that door this night to obtain news to allay his anxiety. It was not a case of faint heart never won fair lady. For her he would have been brave under all circumstances. As he strolled along in the inky, starless night, with no sound but the soughing of the trees and his own footfall upon the road audible in the air, he was tossed hither and thither in his mind in the vague endeavor to find a lucky thought to guide him rightly. He did not wish to appear careless of the welfare and the sorrows of his beloved one and of those whom she loved. But an intrusion upon them at this unseasonable hour seemed unjustifiable, and he must needs persuade himself to wait until the early morning had called the household of the Rectory to its daily duties.

The Fox and Dogs was nominally and legally closed to all but those who could claim that they were *bonâ-fide* travellers, in accordance with the definition of that status by Act of Parliament. The provisions of the Legislature notwithstanding, two or three of the village cronies were seated in the inn parlor, sipping their ale and smoking their long pipes, when Frank entered, and — *mirabile dictu* — the principal instigator of this con-

travention of the laws of his country was no less a person than Mr. Isaac Stringer.

The reader may well wonder how a man so accustomed to abide by the laws of his nation, and so strict in exacting the observance of his own views from others, came to expose both himself and the landlord to the risk of being summoned and fined. Mr. Stringer, like most mortals, was selfish. He was perfectly well-prepared, in this case, if need be, to suffer in his pocket for the offence he was then committing; and had he been mulcted in the sum of five-and-twenty shillings and costs then and there, he would have paid without grumbling. It was, perhaps, not a matter of utter indifference to him that the landlord also exposed himself to punishment, but in this case egotism easily overcame discretion and neighborly love.

The fact was that Mr. Stringer was utterly wretched and miserable. He might well try to play the Roman father, but he found the attempt very onerous. He had to confess to himself that he had not at all the shape and form of a Roman father. He had seen pictures of them. They were all lean and sinewy, and he was rotund and comfortable.

And then Mary had spoiled him so. Everything that he required was always set ready for him, and now the place was deserted. He could not find what he wanted, and times were altogether out of joint.

He had been sitting in his parlor for hours. Darkness had stolen in upon him, and he had not moved even to get a light. At last the shadows of his gloomy thoughts palled upon him, and, rising abruptly, he had put on his hat and had gone out, slamming the door behind him. He found himself at the village inn before

he knew how he got there. The Fox and Dogs was not often honored by a visit from Mr. Stringer, but on this occasion the churchwarden made up for the infrequency of his visits by the prolongation of his stay.

Mr. Stringer found the small talk of the village cronies strangely gratifying. He might have remembered occasions without number when he would have felt disposed to quarrel with nineteen out of twenty of the arguments advanced, but now he was the most docile and amiable of men. He could not tear himself away, and he would not allow the others to tear themselves away. Thus it came that he was not only an offender against the law, but the cause of offence in others.

Without, the street was as silent as the great desert. No footfall disturbed the stillness of the night. A visitor at such an hour was a *rara avis* at the Fox and Dogs. The solitary village constable had gone to sleep long ago, and the law-breakers sat around the heavy oak table in such certainty of freedom from intrusion and detection that they did not even think it necessary to bolt the door.

The sound of the latch, moved by Frank Boyer's hand, followed by his appearance in the doorway, acted upon the small assembly like the shrill call of a vulture upon a dove-cote. Everybody tried to get out of each other's way, and got into each other's way thereby. There ensued the most ridiculous confusion, and hiding of pots, and looking at one another, until they were rallied into something like self-possession by a peal of laughter from Frank.

"Don't mind me, gentlemen," he said, "don't mind me. I am not going to turn informer and earn half the fine, I can assure you."

The spirit of quiet enjoyment, however, had departed. Stringer, with his gyrating hat fidgeting more nervously than ever, shuffled disconsolately out of the place. When the leader had departed, the villagers were not long in following his example, and Frank was left the solitary occupant of the old-fashioned, oak-panelled, and oak-fitted room.

The Fox and Dogs owned but one really good guest-chamber, and that, of course, was assigned to Frank. He felt little disposed to sleep, though. He ordered a glass of whiskey and water, and sat himself down on the high-backed seat by the side of the huge hooded fireplace, thinking, dreaming.

He was nearer to Ophelia than he had been for some time past, and that fact made him feel happier than he had been of late. How blessed is youth to be able to build an Elysium for itself out of its mere imaginings? In the delightful fervor of his five-and-twenty summers, Frank could construct a fairy bridge by which to pass into his darling's close presence.

He sat there, with his head leaning upon his arm, and his foot kicked against the big, polished brass dog of the fireplace. The shining round knob became a magic crystal, in which, at his fancied bidding, the face of his loved one appeared. She was mournful; he knew that she could not possibly be otherwise with the Rector lying on a couch of pain. But she was glad to see him, nevertheless. That he knew also with a convincing certainty. He kept staring at the burnished metal until he nearly hypnotized himself into a semi-trance. In that state he became prophetic to himself, and he fancied he could hear his father's voice welcoming him cheerily, and actually consenting to his union

with Ophelia. And she—she looked into his eyes, happy and smiling—and he himself was gladder than he ever thought he dared to be.

He was roused from his reverie by the landlord's voice.

“It's nigh on two o'clock, Master Frank; and I tek the liberty for to say as I'm a-goin' to bed. You sit up if you like, Master Frank.”

Young Boyer looked up and saw him shuffling with slippered feet out of the room. His measured footfall could be heard on the stairs, and was lost with the closing of a door on the landing above.

Frank did not feel in the least bit inclined to sleep. He was alone with his thoughts, and found them at that moment rather pleasant company which he did not care to lose.

He opened the door and looked out into the calm, still night. Stars and moon were alike hidden behind the clouds, and the houses on the opposite side of the wide village street loomed like phantoms. Frank tried to peer into the darkness, but his eyes had grown momentarily accustomed to the light of the room, and aided him but feebly. Little by little, however, his visionary power increased, and far away to his right he thought he could perceive a tiny speck of light. The effect of that wee gleam upon him was wonderful. Somebody was evidently up and awake at the Rectory. Perhaps it was Ophelia! The bare thought of such a possibility made Frank's blood course more hotly through his veins.

He put on his hat, and, closing the inn door behind him, strolled out. His steps sounded upon the little round stones of the sidewalk like dull taps on a rever-

berating drum. A couple of hundred yards further on he came to the softer macadamized road. He seemed to be in no hurry, but, like a connoisseur with a glass of old port, he tried to spin out the short-lived enjoyment as much as possible. He stopped to light a cigar, and then sauntered on again leisurely, fearful to approach his goal too suddenly, and to find his delightful dream vanishing into thin air. He was not permitted to continue much farther before disappointment asserted its sway. When he reached the rising ground near Thorbury Church, he saw that the gleam of light which he had perceived all along did not proceed from any window in the Rectory, but from the glowing embers of a watchman's fire within Thorbury churchyard. He made straight for it, and found, seated on a low tombstone in front of it, the sexton Habakkuk, muttering in his drowsiness.

"The ugly toad!" Habakkuk murmured, "the pisonous reptile! He a churchwarden! The son of Satan! He a-sayin' as the Rector stole th' ode Bible. I'd shove his lies down his black throat. He a-settin' of hisself up for to judge his betters. It makes me sick, it do."

Frank stood by and listened smilingly. Somebody had evidently aroused the old man's wrath, and Frank shrewdly surmised that that somebody was Isaac Stringer.

"And that theer silly hodeedod of a Jonah. Can't sleep in church without settin' fire to it. And all through that heap of unchristianlike spitefulness, a-grumblin' and a-growlin' about things as he ought to have abode by. I'd like to have my way in parish just for —"

He started up suddenly and glared with frightened

eyes at the unoffending Frank, who was standing the other side of the half-extinguished fire.

Young Boyer could not prevent himself from laughing outright. There was something grotesquely pathetic about the old man's intense tremor.

"It do be Master Frank to be sure, or my old eyes deceive me!" the old man cried out at last. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! What will the Squire say? And you out at this time o' night instead of bein' betwixt the sheets."

"I've come to ask you a question or two, Habakkuk," said Frank. "How is Dr. Hay?"

"Oh, he's better, thank you, sir," the old sexton replied, very much as though he were responding to a sympathetic inquiry concerning a member of his own family. "He's been asleep all the hevenin', and may be now, and that's a lot, you know."

"And Mrs. Hay?" Frank inquired tremblingly. "And Miss Ophelia?"

The moon had escaped from its cloudy prison, and was peering out upon the tranquil scene from a broad patch of deep-blue sky. Just one attendant star glimmered faintly near the silvery edge of the surrounding fleecy masses. The ghostly light spread itself over God's acre, and swathed cypress, cedar, elm, and plane as with a bluish silken gauze. A little way beyond, across the low, moss-covered stone wall and the half-rusty iron railings, a portion of the Rectory stood darkly against the sky, the trees in its background jutting out above its roof. An impulse, an inspiration, made Frank look that way, and if he had beheld an angel at that moment, the young man thought, he could not have felt happier. For there, in the midst of a bright panel formed by the opened window of a lighted

room, his glad eyes saw a dark figure, the figure of a woman, and that woman he knew was Ophelia.

He would have journeyed to Siberia, and, being so gratified, would have been content.

Half an hour afterwards he was sitting in his bedroom composing love-letters by the light of his one tallow candle. Not one did he deem worthy of her to whom they were addressed, and he tore them up, half filling the empty grate with a perfect shower of paper fragments. He fell asleep over his labor of love, and the early rosy dawn, creeping through the curtained window, found him booted and coated, sleeping soundly on his chair.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE broad day streamed gladly into the room, and millions upon millions of scintillating atoms danced in the wide streak of prismatic sunlight which brightened and cheered one-half of the country chamber. Frank, with his arms dangling by his side, with his head resting against the back of his chair, and with his legs stretched far and wide, was still soundly asleep. A rosy-faced and bright auburn-haired chambermaid, after knocking half a dozen times timidly at the door without eliciting a response—afraid lest something might be amiss—tried the lock, and ventured to cast a sly glance into the room. The sharp snap of the bolt as she quickly slammed the door again fell on Frank's drowsy ear and woke him. He moved uncomfortably in his chair, and reached out a fumbling hand as if trying to find the bed on which he ought to have been lying. Then he sat bolt-upright, and looked about him wonderingly, the boots on his feet furnishing the largest share of his crop of amazement.

No young man in the early twenties, enjoying sound health, is ever much discomfited by sleeping in a comfortless position. Frank was five-and-twenty, a perfect athlete, of wholesome mind and disposition. He shook himself together, and laughed at himself for having chosen so peculiar a place of repose. He had slept more soundly there than many a princess under her satin coverlet. A great tub full of cold water

brought by the ostler soon left him hearty, vigorous, and refreshed.

He partook of a hasty breakfast, and sauntered out into the street. He was a universal favorite in the village, and many were the greetings from man, woman, and child which sped him on his road. When he came to the gate which led to the Rectory his hand trembled on the latch, and his step became slower and less decided as he walked along the gravelled path between the dwarf roses and fuchsias which bordered the lawns.

In spite of the matutinal hour the whole Rectory was already fully astir. The great surgeon from Birmingham was there, and the famous oculist from London had come with him. They both had important duties to attend to later in the day, and had therefore chosen this early hour for their consultation about Dr. Hay's condition.

Frank was shown into the morning-room, in which the Rector generally used to receive ordinary visitors. He walked about the place anxiously, and the minutes became weeks. He commenced drumming with his fingers against the panes of the long window, left it for a moment, and went back to resume his nervous rata-plan. Time after time he looked over his shoulder, but that awful door would not open and give admittance to her whom he awaited so fervently. He strained his ears, and listened for the rustling of a dress outside. He fancied he heard one, but it passed in a moment. It had evidently been only a servant. Then he went to the table, and made an energetic pretence of reading title-pages and ends of volumes. He did a dozen little things, each of them intended to make the time appear short, and each of them a failure.

He passed about five minutes like this, but he would fearlessly have asserted that five quarters of an hour had elapsed since he set his foot into the room. The rustling of a lady's dress was heard outside. There was no mistake this time, for the starched skirts in fashion at that period produced a sound peculiar to themselves. The next moment was one of such joy that its tempering sadness was overlooked. Her little hand rested in his. Her pale face was bent towards his. Her dreamy eyes peered into his with an assured tenderness. Even the tears which coursed down her dimpled cheeks left her prettier and more lovable in his eyes than she had appeared in those glad moments when, linked arm in arm, they had strolled across the verdant meadows in the tranquil bliss of early courtship.

How the soft fingers trembled! Neither of them had spoken a word, and each had, with mute eyes, asked a score of questions, as mutely and as eloquently answered. At last she withdrew herself from him gently, slowly.

"They are upstairs," she said. "The doctors are having a consultation, and he is so brave, and so patient, and so humbly prepared for everything."

"What do you mean, my dear?" said Frank softly. "You alarm me."

"Dr. Rolfe has not told us. Auntie has asked him, but he has put her off with evasive and ambiguous replies. I suppose we shall know all about it soon."

Mrs. Hay entered at that moment and gave Frank a mournful welcome.

"Dr Rolfe and Dr. Burns," she said, "have just gone down into Denis's study. Denis has heard that you are here, and has asked for you, and Dr. Rolfe has

given permission that you may be brought into the room."

He followed the ladies upstairs. The whole floor seemed hushed, and the servants walked about silently like flitting ghosts. They passed through one room, where the light was already excluded by drawn blinds, into another where nearly absolute darkness prevailed, except in one corner where a shaded lamp threw a yellowish light against a large screen that protected the rest of the room from the intruding glare.

"Frank is here, Denis," said Mrs. Hay, leading the young man to her husband's bedside, while Ophelia remained at the door tremblingly.

Young Boyer felt the Rector's hand in his burning hot.

"Thank you for having come to see me, Frank," said the quiet, patient voice.

The indestructible good-humor asserted itself even in the midst of sorrow.

"I am such an object to look at," continued the Rector, "that they will not allow anybody to see me, or me to see anybody else. I think I can tell them, though, what they are going to tell me by and by. I tried to look when they took the bandages off a little while ago. I can't see a bit, Frank — not a little bit — not a gleam." The feverish hand pressed the young man's a little more nervously as the sentence drew to its close. That was all.

That was all! And yet it meant so much. It meant life and light. It meant hope and strength. It meant ability to toil in the fields of Christian harvest. It meant his mission on earth, and perhaps his ministry.

Danger threatened his eyesight. They all knew that.

They all dreaded lest it might be already lost, and now he so quietly, calmly, so resignedly, spoke of it as gone. The daylight vanished from his noon of life, leaving him helpless.

"Don't talk like that, dearest," Mrs. Hay said, in tearful accents. "Don't think of it. We shall soon know the worst; but until we have it from the doctor's lips, why anticipate it?"

"Ah, my dear!" the Rector answered. "I know it as well as they. I feel it. And when the worst comes to the worst, was not Homer blind, and Milton? And so many good men have gone through useful lives without seeing daylight! I shall have to rely upon you more than I have ever done, and you won't fail me, I know."

Ophelia's sobs burst upon the quiet of the room like a ripple of bitterness.

"Don't cry, my dear," the Rector called out. "Come here. Come here to me."

She approached, and the Rector reached out a searching hand.

"There's somebody here," he said, "who'll take care of you when I can't. I'm glad now, Frank, you didn't give the little girl up. She may need your support when mine may be nigh on useless."

All this while not a word about his pains, not a syllable about sufferings, and yet they were such as few of us would bear uncomplainingly.

There are heroes who never stepped on battlefield. There are simple, homely martyrs, more lowly perhaps, and less awesome in their endurances, than the men who faced the stake at Smithfield, but not less worthy of our sympathy and of our admiration.

Frank felt that a solemn charge had been laid upon him which he was only too glad to accept. He had the Rector's consent for his future union with Ophelia, but Dr. Hay's words, at this trying moment, seemed to set the seal of final approval upon his hopes. "Take care of her!" Why, it was his dream of happiness on earth to be allowed to take care of her. Their fingers touched with that thrill of excitement which springs only from pure love. His hour of pain brought their mixture of joy and sorrow to them, and they were only human in feeling both equally.

The great men had finished their consultation, and had sent a message that they wished to see Mrs. Hay downstairs. The Birmingham surgeon was a short, thick-set man, with broad shoulders and a leonine head. He had a habit of folding his hands underneath his coat-tails behind his back, and of bending his head forward when he spoke. He had a voice as clear as a deep-sounding bell. He was a man who used little figure of speech, always straight to the point, and clear and incisive in his address.

The London oculist differed from his colleague, as far as personal appearance went, in nearly every particular. He was taller and slighter than the latter, of a delicate complexion, admirably set off by a light-brown beard and mustache. Vast numbers of aristocratic patients — nervous, irritable people who paid immense fees — had inculcated him with a peculiar softness and quietude of address and bearing. There was always a pleasing smile on his face, and few people left his consulting-room absolutely bereft of hope. Yet there was no oculist quicker at diagnosis or sounder in judgment than he.

Mrs. Hay was not long left in suspense when she found

herself in the presence of the two surgeons. Mr. Rolfe's massive form first met her eye. The Birmingham surgeon, who had been in converse with his colleague, turned towards her, rather sharply, she thought.

"Mr. Burns and I have carefully considered your husband's case," he said, "and we have both come to the conclusion that it would be cruel and unwise," — Mrs. Hay's trembling hand clutched the back of a chair, and she held on to it for support as if in fear of grim death. The surgeon looked at her blanched cheeks for a mere second, and continued — "that it would be unwise to conceal from you or from Dr. Hay the fact that his eyesight is injured beyond hope of recovery."

The poor lady staggered half fainting to a seat and sat down.

"No hope! no hope! no hope!" she whimpered, wringing her hands. "My poor Denis! No hope whatever, did you say?"

Mr. Burns stepped to her side, and his voice sounded so soft and gentle to her, so soothingly sympathetic, after the Birmingham surgeon's deep staccato.

"We are very sorry, Mrs. Hay," he said; "we are both very, very sorry. But your husband is a Christian minister, and, after calmly reviewing the facts, we came to the conclusion that both you and he would have sufficient fortitude to be able to bear the knowledge of the worst, and that you would thank us in the end for not having kept you too long in doubt. It would be useless, at this moment, to trouble you with a scientific description. Mr. Rolfe will write it out for your future perusal, and in following his instructions, you obey also mine."

The blow had fallen, and, when she turned for a

second, she saw standing in the open door Ophelia, with a face as white as a sheet, wringing the cambric handkerchief she held in her hands, and Frank with a countenance nearly as pale as the girl's. She was saved the torture of telling them, at any rate, and he who lay so patiently upstairs barely need be told. He had already advised them of what was in store for him.

The two surgeons were gone, and the ladies sat down to a feeble pretence of a breakfast. Frank, who had already partaken of his morning meal, joined them, and sat, with an empty plate before him, opposite Ophelia. None of them had, before that day, sat down to so cheerless a meal. There was no conversation; the ladies seemed lost in their own miserable thoughts, and Frank had neither the heart nor the pluck to address them with commonplaces.

The tea was removed without Mrs. Hay or Ophelia having sipped a drop, and the more solid food was sent away similarly untouched. Ophelia was gazing into the white china plate in front of her, sighing from time to time, and now and then wiping away a tear, and Mrs. Hay sat with folded hands, looking stonily through the open window out on to the lawn. Frank with dry finger drew imaginary, invisible, grotesque figures on his unopened napkin, and moistened his parched lips with his tongue.

The dishes and the plates were cleared away by noiselessly moving servants who had caught the sorrowful infection, but neither Ophelia nor Mrs. Hay budged from their places. At last Mrs. Hay rose, and crossing to her niece, kissed the latter on the forehead. Ophelia silently and tearfully pressed her aunt's hand.

"You are going to tell uncle?" she asked.

Mrs. Hay nodded her head.

“God keep you!” Ophelia whispered; “God keep you and him!”

Another kiss on the forehead, and the ladies parted silently. The afflicted wife bent her steps upstairs with a heart weighed down by the heavy tidings which she bore to that room of suffering.

When Mrs. Hay had left the room, Frank rose, and stepping behind Ophelia's chair, took the girl's head in his hands, and turned her face up towards him.

“You're a brave darling,” he said; “a good, dear, brave girl. But don't break my heart by letting me see that you are so very, very miserable.”

She looked at him for a moment, and without a word began to cry.

“Oh, hang it all!” Frank exclaimed, “I've done it now. I'm a brute. I've made you cry. I ought to bite my tongue off. Don't, don't, there's a dear!”

He looked down upon her so piteously, with his whole soul of love streaming from his eyes, that she never knew how she came to do it, nor why, but she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him. Then, as if struck with all the enormity of her conduct, she pushed him away from her, and fled like a frightened fawn from the room.

Frank sat by that table for a few moments like one dazed. He did not notice the butler who entered the room, salver in hand, bringing a telegram.

“Here's a telegram for the Rector, Mister Frank,” the man said, “and I don't know what to do with it. I don't like to disturb the Rector, nor yet Mrs. Hay, nor yet Miss Ophelia — not just now, I don't. And I thought, if you don't mind, Mister Frank, I'd bring

it to you, and you'd tell me what I ought to do with it."

"You can leave it here," young Boyer replied, and the man, placing the missive on the table, went out as noiselessly as he had entered.

Some twenty minutes or more passed before Mrs. Hay returned.

"I have told him," she said, "and he simply replied, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.' He is asleep now. The knowledge of his fate seems to have brought repose to him."

Her eyes fell on the telegram, and she opened it.

"Thank Heaven for this mercy!" she exclaimed, and handed the paper to Frank.

It came from Saint Sauveur.

"Reinemann and MacWraith," it ran, "have fled country. Have nearly conclusive proof of their conspiracy and fraud. Have placed matter in hands of police."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE news of the Rector's sad fate spread through Thorbury like wildfire, and divided the population into two distinct and bitterly hostile parties. One section of the parishioners, devotedly attached to their minister, and thoroughly appreciative of his noble qualities, traced their pastor's misfortune clearly home to Mr. Stringer's unwarrantable and mischievous interference in matters which concerned him not. It had, by that time, become open talk in the village that the Bible rescued by the Rector from the fire was a valueless imitation. The Rector's friends naturally considered him an innocent victim, and asserted that he had repelled the unfounded charge brought against his character by an exhibition of fortitude worthy of a Christian martyr. The Stringer faction, on the other hand, with the redoubtable churchwarden at their head, were only embittered by the renewed and strenuous opposition they encountered. They proclaimed publicly that they considered the Rector's affliction a just punishment, not only for his popish practices, but also for the fraud, of which he had been, some went so far as to say, a willing or a careless accomplice.

This feud asserted itself openly on the following day, the Sabbath, when the service of the Holy Church was, by the Rector's direction, held by a newly engaged curate in the schoolroom, the only building in the village suitable for such a purpose. The place would have

been much too small to receive all the habitual churchgoers. On this particular occasion, however, the population of the village of Thorbury turned out *en masse*. Nonconformists, who usually frequented a chapel at Heydon Hay — quite a little crowd of them — entirely filled one corner of the long, bare room, whilst men, and women too for that, who had been stiff-necked and stubborn to all Dr. Hay's ministerial advances, seemed suddenly possessed of a desire to reap some of the benefits offered them by England's Church.

The doorway of the schoolroom, broad enough for the children who swarmed in and out with shrill pipings, afforded but insufficient means of entrance. Soon it was blocked up altogether. Habakkuk had been busy in assigning to such of the village aristocracy as had already appeared places in accordance with their position. The two front forms had been left vacant, one for the Rector's family, and one for the Squire, but right up to these, filling up even the gangways and the window-sills, surged a thick mass, wedged together by every one man's and woman's efforts to be so placed as to obtain a good view of the Rector's family.

The dead sound of undertoned conversation hushed suddenly as Mrs. Hay, Ophelia, and Frank entered by the small side-door generally used by the school-mistress.

The ladies wore dark dresses, and thick veils hid the traces of recent tears. A box containing a replenishment of the Rector's pew-library had been sent to the schoolroom, and Frank, who was stooping down to take from it the service books they required, did not notice that the small door had once more opened, and that his father, accompanied by an old gentleman, a neighbor, had entered the place. He was still engaged in sorting

out the necessary books when the Squire stopped in front of him for a moment, in evident hesitation. The ladies looked timidly upon father and son from behind their veils, and a perfect hum of audible excitement rose and swelled through the room. When Frank raised his head on noticing the unusual hushed murmur, Marmaduke Boyer had already stepped to the front bench on the other side, where he was in the act of taking his seat, when Frank unconsciously rose in his turn, and looked his father straight in the face, with a countenance so manly and so appealing, that the Squire, who had tasted the misery of a lonely life more than he cared, jumped up, and, walking straight to the young man, took his outstretched hand between his two and wrung it heartily, while a big tear ran down his ruddy face. Then, shaking both ladies by the hand, he took his son's arm and made him sit down on the bench by his side. All Thorbury had witnessed the open reconciliation of father and son, which at the same time seemed to convey the Squire's espousal of the Rectory cause. Many a throat there would have given a ringing cheer, had any of them dared to show their enthusiasm in the temporary house of God. Some such manifestation was actually threatened among a little knot of injudicious partisans of Dr. Hay, when the small door at the further end again opened, and Mr. Stringer sailed in, solemn and stolid, with his jaws firm-set, and a look of uncompromising determination about his face. He was dressed in his shiniest of broadcloth, with his whitest of collars, and his blackest of stocks.

Then happened an incident which might have led to an explosion of feeling within the school-building itself, but which was providentially averted as we shall see.

Habakkuk had either unintentionally, or with malice aforethought, not provided a seat for Mr. Stringer. Each of the forms afforded accommodation for only three persons. All of them were fully, and some of them more than fully, occupied. The crowd thronged in a thick mass right up to the front benches. The first form on the right of the room was fully occupied by the Squire, the gentleman who was with him, and Frank. The only possible seat for Mr. Stringer was next to Mrs. Hay.

The burly churchwarden stood hat in hand looking right and looking left, looking in front of him and looking behind him. He scowled, and glared, and coughed, and bit his lip, and stretched his neck. Mr. Stringer was not an adept in the art of concealing emotion, and his annoyance at being treated with what he considered contumely was visible to everybody.

No one could tell what the upshot might have been had not Mrs. Hay, with the most studied politeness, moved to one side and beckoned Stringer to take his place beside her. Thus challenged to an exhibition of gentlemanly demeanor, Mr. Isaac Stringer was compelled to submit with inward grumblings. He sat down on the corner of the form, but sat down sideways and edgeways, shaking his head as if his gyrating hat still required to be kept in submission. Even when the congregation rose, Mr. Stringer persisted, as he did indeed all through the service, in half turning his back, as if the poor ladies were his mortal enemies, and he was tolerating their presence with Christian forbearance.

The service naturally passed off smoothly enough. The new curate had preached a short and rather commonplace sermon, in which none of the doctrines in dis-

pute between the parties were touched upon. He was a pupil of an old friend of Dr. Hay's, and had passed a couple of years of never ceasing and untiring devotion among the poorest of the poor in the great hive of unspeakable misery at the East End of the Metropolis. He was glad to escape, even if it were for a breathing-space only, into the pure and invigorating air of the Midland fields and pastures. Quiet and unassuming, he became an immediate favorite, and more than one spiteful remark was passed, after the service was over, among the adherents of the Stringer faction: "What a difference there is between the new curate and the Rector."

If Habakkuk had intentionally forgotten to provide fitting accommodation for the churchwarden of the parish, Mr. Stringer had made up his mind to lose no time in bringing the recalcitrant one to book. Such insubordination was not to be put up with. Mr. Stringer, regardless of the Sabbath day, promised himself all through the service that he would discuss the matter with the sexton, after his own fashion, the moment he could find an opportunity. Mr. Stringer was even determined enough to vow that he would make an opportunity, if none would present itself of its own accord.

The big room was nearly empty. Mrs. Hay and Ophelia had left, and the Squire and his friend and Frank had followed them. The congregation had trickled out, one by one, and was spread all over the village street. Half a dozen elderly men and women were still loitering in the lower corner near the entrance, all agog with excitement as to what would happen when Mr. Stringer found himself alone with Habakkuk.

The churchwarden, with his small hat placed firmly

on his big head, with both hands in his trousers pockets, and with legs far apart, was standing close beside the open little private door. The old man was busy locking up the borrowed church-service in one of the schoolroom cupboards. He seemed totally unabashed by Mr. Stringer's threatening presence. He went about his duties mechanically and unconcernedly. He neither hurried himself nor did aught slower than was his wont upon other occasions. When he had quite finished he looked about to see if everything was safe, and then, with his usual rapid shuffle, he collected his hat, his stick, and his worn gloves. All the three passages were open to him. He might have made his exit along the centre gangway by the broad lower door, and Mr. Stringer would have had to run after him to intercept him. But if the churchwarden was pig-headed, Habakkuk Wood yielded him not a jot in bull-dog obstinacy and terrier-like disposition to fight.

Stringer evidently meant to have it out with him, and the old man chuckled at the idea that he would give his opponent every opportunity. If there was one man in the parish who was not afraid of Mr. Stringer, that man was Habakkuk Wood. If there was one man in the same community who would give the churchwarden tit for tat on each and every occasion, with or without provocation, that man was again Habakkuk Wood. The old man actually quivered with pleasurable excitement, like a war-horse at the call of the trumpet.

Habakkuk's face was creaming with a grin which Mr. Stringer considered most objectionable and subversive of church discipline. Habakkuk shuffled towards the door, and in doing so looked past the churchwarden as if the latter were not existent. One might have

thought he was intently engaged in counting the pigeons on the roof of the corn-chandler's on the opposite side of the way. He had already one foot on the sill of the door, when Mr. Stringer pushed his own portly presence in front of him. The burly one was, by his own action, compelled to step backward into the street, as the old sexton would not budge an inch. The result of this movement was that a crowd collected immediately round the pair. Men, women, and children hurried up in troops and formed a semi-circle, all awaiting the commencement of the coming fray.

Mr. Stringer began operations by taking off his hat, and bowing with mock politeness.

"Habakkuk Wood," he said, "*Mr.* Habakkuk Wood. You're sexton of this parish and I'm churchwarden. Might I tek the liberty to ask why you give seats this morning to every person except me?"

The aggravating grin never left Habakkuk's face. He was evidently intent on irritating and annoying his opponent.

"You mayn't tek the liberty, Isaac Stringer," he replied, and took a step forward to shoulder his way through the crowd.

Habakkuk had, however, chosen a most unfortunate spot by which to make his egress. He found himself face to face with half a dozen of Stringer's stanchest supporters. Two of them, great hulking, smock-frocked farm laborers, made themselves as broad as they could, and closed up tightly to one another, so as to bar Mr. Wood's progress. A buxom, red-faced woman by their side even put out a hand to stop the old man from passing by.

Mr. Stringer felt that the balance of power was on

his side, and his innate shrewdness told him that he might play a master-stroke by which to increase his popularity with his own party, and greatly damage his enemies.

“Friends,” he said, looking round the circle with well-assumed indignation, “you see how this man’s a-treatin’ me. That’s been his game and the Rector’s all along. Hinsolence, hinjustice, and defiance of the law. We all know what it’s brought to the Rector, but I’ll tek care as we sha’n’t be mixed up in it. We’ll sit apart from ’em. We’ll sit apart from ’em in the church, and we won’t have anything to do with ’em anywheer else. *That’s* what we’ll do, my friends.”

Isaac Stringer thought that by this speech he had spoken a sort of major excommunication against the Rector, and all who sided with him. He stood there like a fat and pompous Nemesis pronouncing the doom of all those who differed from him, and he might have been left to enjoy a high opinion about his elocutionary effort, had not Habakkuk burst out into a peal of shrill downright laughter. The old man laughed until he held his sides. Stringer, turning white with rage, kept his clenched fists in his trousers for fear of being tempted to box the sexton’s ears.

Nobody could have foretold what would be the result of this peculiar altercation. Suddenly the dense crowd surrounding the two combatants swayed hither and thither, and heads and arms bobbed right and left as if in the effort to afford a passage for some one who was approaching from behind. Over and above the hulla-baloo of discordant and angry exclamations could be heard the Squire’s strident voice shouting, —

“What’s the matter here? What are you up to? Let me see what’s going on.”

The crowd respectfully made way, and a moment afterwards Marmaduke Boyer, his friend, and Frank stood within the semi-circle of excited faces.

"I thought so!" roared the Squire. "You're having another quarrel in a public place, Stringer. When will you learn sense and discretion?"

The indignation which had been previously assumed by Mr. Stringer now became real. Insulted, as he thought himself, by the Squire, before a whole crowd of the parishioners, he came to the conclusion that dignity was the proper means of guarding his reputation. He fixed his hat upon his head with a vicious grip.

"Marmaduke Boyer," he said quietly and doggedly, "you've told me before all these people that I haven't got any sense and any discretion. That's a hard speech for you to mek to me, Squire though you be; but I hope as I'm a Christian, and this is the Lord's Day. So I forgive you, and good-morning to you."

There was something of a quaint Ironside dignity about him as he glanced right and left, and made his way through the people, who opened out to let him pass. He had not gone many steps before he turned and waited for the Squire, who was moving in the same direction.

"Squire Boyer," he said, "you're a magistrate; I'm going to fetch a lawyer from Birmingham as soon as ever a train goes to-morrow morning, and as I've got a serious charge to make against Dr. Hay I hope as you'll be at home to hear it." With that he paced away, leaving the gentlemen nonplussed and speechless.

He walked away so fast that when he reached his own door great drops of perspiration stood on his fore-

head. The midday meal was laid out as usual in the trim and clean kitchen, and a tidy elderly woman was busy placing on a dish a big, well-cooked joint of roast beef. A jug of foaming, purling home-brewed ale stood next to Stringer's plate on the table.

He sat down without taking off his hat, and looked away moodily and gloomily. The drinking-glass in front of him bore an engraved inscription which fascinated him. It read: "To Mary, on her thirteenth birthday." Her mother — his loving, dutiful wife, the companion of so many years — had given it to the child without whose comforting presence he passed his first Sunday. As though Fate had decreed it to try his temper, his eye fell upon a big wooden spoon, upon the handle of which the letters I. S. were rudely engraved. He remembered — and it hurt him to remember — that Joseph had carved out that spoon, and had given it to him as a boyish birthday present some time about ten years ago.

The woman placed the steaming joint in front of him. Seeing that he did not move, she changed the position of the carving-knife and fork.

Something was evidently wrong with master, but she dared not address him — not just then. She waited silently for a minute or two, and then again shifted the knife and fork, and the latter fell with a slight clatter from the dish on to the table.

"What a row you're makin', Susan," Stringer said in petty annoyance.

"Dinner's quite ready, master," the woman answered.

"I don't want any dinner," the churchwarden exclaimed in a choking voice. "Tek it away! Tek it away and eat it yourself."

He rose tremblingly. His legs seemed to fail him in the effort. For full two hours afterwards the housekeeper, puzzled beyond measure by her master's conduct, could hear him walking up and down in his bedroom upstairs like a caged tiger.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE unlucky Jonah had been kept in the village lock-up in defiance of all the principles of Magna Charta. No statute of the commonwealth defines setting fire even to a church by accident as an indictable offence, and Jonah had to be allowed to depart, to the great regret of the village constable, who had found Master Jonah much more agreeable company than he had imagined, and who — I record it with regret — had passed hours upon hours in playing “snip” with him, relieving the luckless one of all his remaining cash, consisting of the sum of one and fourpence halfpenny.

Jonah was shuffling down the village street, his big hobnailed shoes clattering over the rough stones, when he came across his father, who received him in a far from friendly manner.

“They’ve let thee out, then, have they, thee villain of unrighteousness? They’ve let thee out, and thee’ll be up to further mischief. Cum home, and hide that ugly face o’ thine!”

“It ain’t my fault if I am ugly,” Jonah replied surlily; “it’s yours and mother’s.”

For all reply the old man took him by the scruff of the neck and pushed him along the road.

“Go!” he said. “Wait till thee get’st home, and I’ll teach thee to reply to thy betters.”

Now, in comparison with Jonah, Habakkuk was a shrimp of a man, and the hulking lad accepted his

father's assaults much in the spirit of that brewer's drayman who, when asked why he allowed his wife to beat him, replied, "It amuses she, and it doesn't hurt I." It gratified Habakkuk to imagine that he was able to wreak summary vengeance upon his overgrown son, and as he never succeeded in making the slightest impression upon Jonah's leathery epidermis, the lanky one could well afford to let the old man thus assert his parental authority.

Habakkuk lived in a little cottage of his own at the far end of the village, within a very short distance of the Rectory. It was a cleanly place, with yellow distempered walls, and with its whitewashed kitchen, a perfect pattern of pristine neatness. The old man did all the work of the house himself, and asked but little assistance from his lazy son. There was a little vegetable garden at the back — a mere patch — but the fence at the other end of it ran right up to the Rectory grounds.

Father and son were seated in the kitchen over a small roast leg of mutton, the Sunday dinner being the one weekly meal when the sexton allowed himself a fare of hot roast meat. Jonah had bolted the slice which his father had placed before him, as a bull terrier would have done, and was looking with greedy eyes, first at his father, and then at the remainder of the joint. While so engaged his glance travelled all over the room, and peered out of the window into the garden beyond. In this wise he saw no less a person than Miss Ophelia, who was standing in the Rectory grounds on the other side of the fence, and calling out to Habakkuk.

The sexton shuffled out towards her swiftly, bowing repeatedly as he came nearer to her.

Ophelia was standing on the lower bar of the fence, with her arms resting on the top.

"Mrs. Hay is displeased with you, Habakkuk," she said.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" the old man replied; "you don't mean to say so! I'm so sorry. What have I been an' done? I'll never do it again, that I won't. Mrs. Hay displeased! I'm that sorry, that I am! What's she displeased about?"

"You did not keep a seat for Mr. Stringer," said Ophelia.

The sexton bridled up unconsciously.

"Why should I keep a seat for him?" he asked. "Who's he, as ordinary Christians ain't good enough to sit alongside o' he? A mean, sneaking son o' Jezebel, as is the cause of all the mischief in this parish, and of all the trouble what's got into it. And with your good leave, Miss Ophelia, I'll say it, what oughtn't, Mrs. Hay was much too good when she made room for him."

"He had to sit somewhere, and there was not a seat anywhere else," Ophelia remonstrated.

"Let him stand! He's big enough and vicious enough," Habakkuk exclaimed.

"You must allow us to have our own way," Ophelia retorted; "and Mrs. Hay desires that you will in the future always provide a fitting place for Mr. Stringer."

"Oh, I'd provide a fittin' place for Mr. Stringer," the old man snarled. "Ashton Jail is a fittin' place for him. That's wheer he'd go if I had my way."

"You must not talk like that," Ophelia remonstrated. "We all have unpleasant duties to do now and then, and you must do yours, or Mrs. Hay will be very much annoyed."

With that she skipped away, leaving Habakkuk in a state of irritation at the order which had been conveyed to him.

The parish of Thorbury had before that day been divided into two sections by the controversy between the Rector and the churchwardens, but now it was in a state of open seething feud. At every dinner-table in the village Stringer's publicly proclaimed intention to prosecute the Rector was discussed. It must be admitted that even the churchwarden's most avowed partisans felt misgivings of the justice of their case in attacking the Rector on the ground of his honesty. Such is the perversity of human nature, however, that men — right-thinking Christian men — so far threw dust into their own eyes as to assert that the Rector was guilty, and that Mr. Stringer, in spite of Dr. Hay's pitiable condition, was only doing his duty in submitting the affair to a legal decision. In a place where everybody knew everybody else, and had known everybody else ever since they had been born; where everybody had grown up in sight of everybody else, and where, therefore, figuratively speaking, the houses had glass fronts, such a spirit of dissension acted most unwholesomely upon the community. Men who had been friends for years became estranged from one another. People who had been comrades at school shrugged their shoulders as they passed each other, and it was a bitter fact that the most peaceably disposed of men, the most law-abiding, and the most gentle, had an unwilling share in creating this soreness of heart.

Nobody felt this state of things more keenly and more irritatingly than the Squire. That the village of which he was lord should thus declare itself in open faction

feud, like the Montagues and Capulets of yore, without asking his opinion, was bitter enough. An accusing voice told him that he himself had, in a measure, countenanced the quarrel by the position he had taken up regarding the Rector. But then Marmaduke Boyer was a gentleman, and to his gentlemanly perception the charge of dishonesty against the Rector was naturally simply absurd and silly.

Squire Boyer that afternoon, in spite of some untoward circumstances, was a happy man. He had shaken hands with his boy, and his boy was with him again. When the pair had reached home, and Frank had entered his usual bedroom, the Squire followed him thither. He walked up to the young man, and placing one hand on his shoulder, and grasping his son's hand with the other, he had looked the latter straight in the face and had said:

"Frank, I'm sorry."

"Don't say another word, dad," young Boyer had replied, and the two had shaken hands like old friends. But there was just that little lump in each throat, and that little hesitation of the voice, which showed that they felt what they did not express.

The Squire was standing with his hands behind his back against the vacant chimney-piece of the big library, and Frank was seated in a large old-fashioned armchair a few paces from him. They were both sipping their madeira after luncheon, and the blue clouds of cigar-smoke curled in the air.

"Well, lad," the Squire exclaimed, "I suppose you are going to marry Ophelia."

"I will, with your permission, dad," Frank replied.

"I suppose you know what you're doing," Boyer con-

tinued ; "and when it's once done you can't undo it easily, but you can regret it soon enough."

"She is the best girl in the wide, wide world," young Boyer asserted with determination ; "and the man who cannot be happy with her never will be."

"I have heard something like that before, my boy," the fox-colored one retorted. "I only hope it will turn out as you think. Here's my hand upon it."

The final seal was thus set upon the Squire's reconciliation with the Rector. News spreads quickly in a place like Thorbury, and Mr. Stringer, who had laid down to sleep after his perambulations up and down his bed-chamber, and who had, on awakening, sauntered out into the street, was speedily told that the Squire had thrown the weight of his influence in the scale against him.

"Very well," he replied. "I just sha'n't apply to him for the summons, that's all. I'll go to Sir Frederick."

Sir Frederick Halstead was the elderly gentleman and neighbor of Boyer's who had joined the latter at the morning's service.

Many things combined to irritate and try Mr. Stringer's temper that afternoon. Men in whose judgment he was wont to place confidence told him he was wrong in so obstinately and uncharitably attacking a man who was stretched upon a bed of pain. Others asserted that he was making a fool of himself. Still others doubted his soundness of judgment, and the opinions of the few who coincided with him were mere drops in the flood of disapproval which came upon him with torrent velocity.

We have it on record that men who were awaiting their doom at the lions' teeth begged to be removed from a place where the flies annoyed them. Stringer, in the midst of the excitement to which he was exposed, was

in a dreadful state of suspense to know how he would be treated during the evening service. He went early, determined, if no seat were reserved for him, to plant himself firmly on the form reserved for the Rector's family. He had gone to the temporary church expecting to be irritated, and he was irritated grievously because he was not irritated as he expected. Habakkuk met him with ludicrous deference, and conducted him to the bench immediately behind the Squire's. There was no help for it—he had to be satisfied; and if ever a man was unhappy at having obtained what he asked for, that man was Mr. Stringer. He would have so enjoyed having to find his seat by an exhibition of authority, and he was wofully disappointed that no actual cause of quarrel was left to him for the moment.

When the evening service was over, the churchwarden returned to his house sore at heart. He went to bed supperless, and without his customary toddy. He passed a miserable night, tossing and rolling about his bed, now too hot, then too cold, never comfortable. The flock pillow which he had used for about twenty years had suddenly become lumpy, and he felt sure it was the fault of that old woman, who could not arrange it as well as Mary used to do. What a bother it was that Mary was gone! He was perfectly sick and tired of himself; everything seemed to go wrong. Who could have put it into Habakkuk's head to provide that seat for him during the evening service? Habakkuk would never have done it of his own accord. That was just another of the Rector's spiteful tricks, he felt sure. By such underhand practices he was continually trying to proclaim himself the peacemaker of the parish.

Self-communion did not act as a somnolent factor

with Mr. Stringer. He saw the moon grow fainter and fainter, and the sky grow lighter and lighter, and the early blush of dawn found him as wide awake as ever. When the advent of the king of day proclaimed itself in a broad streak of red and gold on the eastern horizon, Mr. Stringer still tossed about his bed unrefreshed.

The old housekeeper had been moving about for half an hour past, and Stringer, dressing himself rapidly, after escaping various accidents during the process of shaving, went downstairs in a hideous temper. It was lucky for the old woman, and most irritating again for Stringer, that he could find absolutely nothing to grumble about. Contrary to his custom, he went straight into the breakfast-room — he who always took his morning tea in the kitchen. But the place was swept and tidy, and the tray with his tea and toast was brought to him in a jiffy.

He had eaten no dinner on the previous day nor tasted supper, and his customary robust appetite asserted itself in spite of him. Here again the man's dogged character showed itself. He was hungry, very hungry, but he did not want it said in the village that he was a glutton, or set an example to improvidence by allowing himself aught but tea and toast for breakfast. The huge cold joint stood on the sideboard, and he could have easily helped himself; but no — he had been satisfied with tea and toast these many years past, and tea and toast would have to suffice him that day. And more than that, it was his own fault if he had gone to bed hungry the day before, and this morning he would only allow himself the usual quantity. There was no trace of meanness or stinginess in this course of action; it was simply part and parcel of the man's character.

He was as obstinate with himself as he was with others.

He took the morning train, and arrived in Birmingham long before any lawyer's office was open. He first of all wandered about the streets disconsolately, then went into the smoking-room of the Stork Hotel, and sat himself down in a round wooden armchair in the corner. He had never found the morning papers so dull. His party, the Tories, were going to the dogs — of that he felt certain. They had not offered half enough serious opposition to the ridiculous innovations of the Aberdeen Government. What were such men as Lord Derby, Mr. Disraeli, and Lord St. Leonards about, to allow Lord Palmerston and Lord John Russell to ride roughshod over them? He was weary of it — he was weary of everything.

The clock struck nine as he entered his lawyer's office in Temple Row. He was always in litigation with somebody or other. When he was not suing somebody else, somebody else was sure to be suing him. He therefore was a most valuable client, and the clerks received him with deference. Mr. Underwood had not yet arrived, but he would not be long. Would Mr. Stringer wait in his room? Mr. Stringer expressed his willingness to wait in Mr. Underwood's room, but was exceedingly annoyed at having to wait. The chapter of inconveniences and annoyances was evidently intent on continuing.

Mr. Stringer had read the names on all the tin cases which half filled one side of the room. He had made himself acquainted with the endorsements on all the legal papers which were packed on the huge table. He had examined every auctioneer's bill on the walls, and

had found them uninteresting. Downright impatience was beginning to assert itself, when the door opened and Mr. Underwood entered, bustling and smiling, and greeted his client with a cheery welcome. He was a tall thin man, with a smoothly shaven face, and a nearly perfectly bald head. His piercing gray eyes were always on the move, and a perpetual smile sat on his otherwise sphinx-like face. A clerk followed him with an armful of deeds and documents, which he placed on his employer's table, where a little pile of letters was already lying.

"I won't keep you a moment, Mr. Stringer," the lawyer said, glancing over the addresses. "There is just one here which I may have to answer on the spot."

Mr. Stringer turned his eyes up to the ceiling while his legal adviser perused the letter, scribbled a few words on it, and handed it to his clerk. The latter bowed stiffly and went out.

"Now I'm at your service, my dear Mr. Stringer," the lawyer exclaimed cheerily. "What have we on this time?"

The churchwarden set to work, and stated his case with such directness and lucidity as he was capable of. The solicitor, accustomed to his client's style and descriptions, saw through the whole matter immediately.

"I'm afraid you are overstepping the mark, Mr. Stringer, when you speak of a criminal prosecution," he said, stroking his chin. "Dr. Hay is undoubtedly responsible to the parish for the value of the book which has been taken away, and the Court would give judgment in favor of the parishioners. What the amount of the judgment would be depends upon the estimate of the jury. But there is no magistrate in England who, under the circumstances you have stated, would issue a criminal summons against Dr. Hay."

"And why not?" exclaimed Mr. Stringer. "Will you tell me how that ode Bible can have been exchanged and the Rector not be a party to it?"

"Mr. Stringer! Mr. Stringer! I'm ashamed of you," Mr. Underwood replied quietly. "You, a man of discernment, such as I have always found you! It is to my pecuniary interest that you should be engaged in litigation, criminal or civil; but I am not going to allow you to fling your money into the gutter."

"And if I do want to fling my money into the gutter, that don't concern anybody but me, does it?" Mr. Stringer cried in annoyance.

"My dear Mr. Stringer, you must really listen to reason," the lawyer replied stolidly. "You yourself told me just now that two men had been engaged at the Rectory restoring the old Bible. The case is as clear as daylight, and any magistrate would see it in the same way as I do. Dr. Hay's well-known, high, and blameless character, his whole life, which lies like an open book before the world, would make a charge such as you would prefer against him preposterous, even if the circumstances of the case did not themselves afford an easy solution. The two men whom Dr. Hay employed are evidently the guilty parties, and Dr. Hay is as much a victim as the parish. I will place the matter in the hands of the police, if you like—that is quite another affair—and I will issue a writ against Dr. Hay if the parish authorities require me to do so. But beyond that I should not advise you to go."

Stringer had been in anything but an agreeable temper when he left his home that morning, but compared to him when he returned to it the proverbial bear with the proverbial sore head was a mild, meek, loving, and lovable creature.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE green of the early autumn foliage had given way to russets and yellows, and the leaves were scattered far and wide on the country roads. A mild November heralded the beginning of winter with soft gray skies and pearly morning mists.

The village of Thorbury was still as divided as ever. Mr. Stringer had bowed to the inevitable, and had contented himself by charging the Rector with gross recklessness in the care of the Church's property.

The latter, barely recovered from his hurts, and with the light of his eyes forever gone, had not yet stirred beyond the Rectory gates.

Thorbury Church was not destined to remain long a prey to desolation. Subscriptions had flowed in right and left, and workmen were busier than ever in roofing in and restoring the ancient walls, and in refitting the house of God. Before winter would have sent its first snows, it was to be inaugurated in solemn service held by the Rector himself.

During all this while Mr. Stringer had been decidedly unhappy. Some of his own partisans were tiring and becoming lukewarm, but with every individual defection the remainder seemed to become more bitter. The Stringer faction, aping the manner of their chief, assumed airs of injured forbearance, but took practical means of showing the spirit of animosity which actuated them. The corn-chandler, for instance, was one of the

Rector's strong partisans, and the Stringerites who had previously dealt with him now went to Heydon Hay or Castle Barfield for their supply. There was a little local brewery, famous for miles round for the excellence of its ale. The Stringerites favored their idiosyncrasies and punished their stomachs by sending to Castle Barfield for small beer, which cost them quite as much as the local renowned beverage. Those who imagine that "boycotting" took its origin in Ireland are mistaken. In many an English village have occurred incidents similar to those just recited as far back as men can remember. It was a very mild form of boycotting, it is true, but its moral purpose was the same. In a small place like Thorbury a man's business is easily ruined, and the persons who favored Mr. Stringer's opponents suffered severely. There were no customers for them outside of the village. They had at all times quite enough to do to keep the wolf from the door, and with one-half of their usual patronage withdrawn, some of them were in a sad plight indeed.

It was small consolation to Mr. Stringer to see some of his opponents suffer in this wise. He would have given one-half of all he possessed to have had his own way in his quarrel with the Rector.

He had received a letter from Mary informing him that she was living with Mrs. Noble, but not a line since then. He had learned from the newspapers that his son was, after all, not called upon to go to the Crimea, and knowing that both Mary and Joseph were in London, living in near vicinity to one another, he had got it into his head that they were conspiring against him. Had he been asked why he entertained that opinion, he could not have given a satisfactory answer. After a while he

came to lay the blame of Mary's flight on Joseph's shoulders. *His* example had led her away. He could have done without his son forever, but Mary was a sad loss to him.

He had kept his girl's letter in his pocket, and night after night he would pull it out and turn over its crumpled leaves, trying to gather new information from its short and pithy wording. It naturally always told the same tale.

DEAR FATHER, — I am living with Mrs. Noble, and am very comfortable. Joseph comes to see me now and then. I have not yet found a place, but hope to get one soon. I hope you are well.

Your affectionate daughter,

MARY.

Somehow or other it did not seem to him quite like Mary, that letter. He was not a connoisseur of style, but Mary's particular charm of letter-writing was not there. It seemed to him brusque, not at all gentle and loving, as Mary's letters had been when she had previously been away from home on short visits — nothing like as filial even as that letter which he had found on the table on the morning when she left his house. Somebody was advising her, and advising her against him; but they might advise her all their lives, and all her life, and he would not stir a finger, not he. But it was a shame — a cruel, burning, infamous shame — that people should be found to make mischief between a father and his daughter. She could not possibly be as comfortable at Mrs. Noble's as she had been at home, and he felt sure she would have returned long ago if somebody had not advised her against that course. In his mind he charged both Mrs. Noble and Joseph with

having given that guilty advice, and was equally incensed against both.

But, after all, as he thought the matter over carefully, the primary cause of Mary's running away, as of all the other ills and annoyances which had befallen him, was the Rector. The reader may well open his eyes wide in expectation of learning by what course of reasoning Mr. Stringer arrived at that amazing conclusion. To Mr. Stringer, however, the question presented no difficulty. Had Thorbury Church not been set on fire through the Rector's reckless appointment of Jonah as guardian, and had he — Stringer — not been put out of all patience by the Rector's insulting conduct at the fire, he would not have been in such a vile temper with Mary, he would most probably not have threatened her as he did, and Mary would not have run away. Therefore it was plain as daylight to Mr. Stringer that Dr. Hay was responsible for Mary's flight. He felt so much consolation in thus shifting from his own shoulders the reason why his daughter left her home that he inwardly digested it, and re-digested it, with intense satisfaction. It acted with twofold benevolence. It eased his mind as regarded himself, and added another point to the long list of the Rector's offences.

Stringer had heard that Dr. Hay had lost his eyesight. The recital of this grievous affliction made no impression whatever on the churchwarden. He was not a cruel man, but, to start with, he did not quite understand what blindness meant, and then his general bitterness against the Rector hid from him the fact that he was uncharitable even in this matter.

He was walking towards Heydon Hay one afternoon, when, on passing the Rectory grounds, he saw, strolling

towards the church, the Rector, with Ophelia on one side of him and Frank on the other. The first view he obtained of the little party was that of their backs, and he noticed nothing particular except that they seemed to be walking very slowly. He knew that Mrs. Hay was confined to her room unwell, and the spiteful thought suggested itself to him, "He hasn't got the whole family with him, that's all." At that moment he had forgotten everything he had heard about the Rector's blindness.

His curiosity, somehow or other, prompted him to walk on faster, so as to pass the little group, and he overtook them by the churchyard gate. Frank had his hand on the latch, and Dr. Hay was leaning on Ophelia's arm. His tall form stooped more than ever, and his hair was quite white.

Stringer saw that both Ophelia and Frank looked towards him, and that Frank then addressed the Doctor. After that came a moment of such awe to the churchwarden that he never forgot it. The Rector raised his head, and Stringer, for the first time, saw his closed eyes. There was something so indescribably pitiful, so majestic, in that blind face, that Stringer felt smitten to the heart, and walked away as fast as he could in red shame.

He reached the sign-post, a quarter of a mile from the church, without knowing how he got there. Then, little by little, his equanimity returned, and he felt wroth with himself for having allowed himself to be thus upset. Those closed eyes haunted him, and he hated the Rector for haunting him with his closed eyes.

As he lay awake on the following night an awful thought struck him like a sledge-hammer, and left him dazed. Why, he himself was the cause of the Rector's walking into the fire. He writhed under it for a moment,

like a tortured wretch upon an Inquisition rack. Great cold drops stood upon his forehead, and he sat upright in his bed as if ghosts affrighted him. The moment afterwards he laughed at himself for a fool and an idiot. Why should he blame himself? What had he to blame himself for? He had done his duty, and nothing but his duty. He put his hand upon his heart and assured himself that he was not only utterly blameless, but deserving of high commendation in having acted as he did. The shock of the afternoon, the excitement, first of the self-accusation, then of the self-exculpation, wore him out physically and mentally, and brought to him the sound sleep which had long been a stranger to his couch.

During the few days that followed Stringer purposely hovered repeatedly about the works in progress at the church in the hope of meeting the Rector. He had made up his mind not to be again frightened by that blind face, and he wanted to become accustomed to it. He was, however, doomed to disappointment.

The weather became chiller and bleaker, and November, that had come in like a lamb, went out like a lion. Mr. Stringer still paid daily repeated visits to the works of the now nearly completed church, without, however, once coming across Dr. Hay. He would potter about the churchyard and the church and the vestry for hours, busying himself about this, questioning about that, standing in draughty places. He saw a good deal of the Squire, of Frank, of Ophelia, and of Mrs. Hay, also of Saint Sauveur, and a great deal more than he cared for of Habakkuk and Jonah; but his eyes lighted not once on Dr. Hay. He would have dearly liked to have questioned some of the ladies and gentlemen just named about this peculiar and, to his

mind, studied absence, but naturally dared not. Had he cared to inquire of those who were well informed on the subject, he would have learned that the noise of the men at work irritated the Rector's nerves. He would have been told further that, as daylight or night made no difference to the afflicted minister, Dr. Hay usually went to the church when everybody had left it. There he prepared himself for the continuance of his ministry by accustoming himself to move about the place without assistance.

In the first week of December a howling, biting, early winter blast made Thorbury Church a perfect ice-house. All the workmen were sneezing and coughing, and Mr. Stringer, who stuck to the place with that bulldog tenacity which characterized him in everything, sneezed and coughed also. His back began to ache, and he felt dull pains in his limbs. He was not to be put off his task so easily, however. He took a double glass of toddy before going to bed, to drive away his cold, and woke to find that he was not in any way relieved of it. The next day he was worse, but Thorbury Church still claimed his presence for hours. The weather was vile; the winter, which had begun mildly, had set in with dire fierceness, and it was snowing, raining, freezing, and thawing in turns. These inclemencies of the elements, with the addition of a stifling fog, were not conducive to Mr. Stringer's recovery, especially as he would persist in haunting a building which was as yet insufficiently fitted with doors and windows.

Again he tried the whiskey cure before retiring to rest, and not only found it once more a failure, but also productive of an abominable headache. Again he wrapped himself up in coats and mufflers, and again he

walked to the parish church. Not so fast, though, as previously, nor with such determination or intensity of purpose as before. He felt lax, and anything but strong, but he would not acknowledge to anybody, least of all to himself, that he was ill.

When he returned home of an evening he would rail against fate for having deprived him of Mary. Had Mary been with him he would not have been in this state. She would have known what was good for him. She would have tended him and nursed him, and he would have been well again long ago, and able to move about as was his wont. If the days were long and weary, the nights were longer and wearier. Few people ever visited him. He had many partisans, but he could count his friends on one hand and have fingers to spare. He had discouraged even those who were his friends from calling. Thus it came that when illness made his already lonely home more unhomelike than ever, there was no hand except the old housekeeper's to give him as much as a glass of water.

The restoration of the church was so far advanced that its re-opening on Christmas Eve was publicly announced. A polite note, informing him that such was the Rector's intention, had been sent to his house. He read the letter during his breakfast, and again wandered out for his customary visit to the church; but he never got as far as that. All along the road he felt himself growing weaker and weaker, and uncomfortable chills had crept over him. When he reached the Fox and Dogs he was glad to allow himself to be led into the parlor, and to sit down before the roaring fire. He hated doctors, and would never call one to himself or his, except in the direst extremity. The innkeeper,

however, sent for the village physician, whether Stringer liked it or not, and the churchwarden was packed off to his house in a close carriage, and deposited in his bed by the landlord and his ostler. Strict orders were given to the housekeeper that she was not to allow her master downstairs on any pretence. The amazement and distress of the poor creature, on hearing this injunction, may be easily imagined. She was at a loss to know how she, who was frightened out of her life at the very sight of her master, was to prevent him from doing exactly what he wanted.

The few days that followed were passed by Stringer in a state of high fever. His old housekeeper sat up with him, and nursed him day and night, but he missed Mary so much. The old woman was well enough in her way, and she meant kindly, but she was clumsy, and irritated him over and over again, and she knew nothing, and could give no information about men and things.

After one long miserable night of fever and pain, he would have had it in his heart to write to Mary, begging her to return, but on trying a pen he felt that he could not guide it. He might have confessed his weakness to his child, and have asked her — he and she the only witnesses of his humiliation — to come and again cheer his house with the sunshine of her presence. But he was still too proud — why would he not confess to himself that he was too obstinate? — to admit strangers to a share in such a secret. The letter, therefore, remained unwritten, and as stout a heart as ever beat in English yeoman's breast was nigh on breaking, simply because it was made of too unyielding a fibre.

The days passed, and Stringer recovered slowly.

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The weather was still bitter. Snow on the ground as far as the eye could reach, snow whirling in the air, all the landscape swathed in a white pall. They allowed him to sit up in an armchair in his bedroom of a daytime, but even if they had permitted him to go out he had not the strength of body nor of will to desire it.

A few of his stanchest partisans paid him formal visits. Each call left an added taste of bitterness. He was told that the Rector was walking about the village as if he were still possessed of the sight of his eyes — that through the Squire's influence, and by Dr. Hay's persuasive and seemingly ubiquitous presence, the village of Thorbury was rallying itself on the Rector's side — that his own party was dwindling to a mere handful, and that, in fact, since he had been unable to leave his house, his cause and his party in the parish had gone thoroughly to the bad.

Christmas Eve came, and Stringer was still confined to his room. He felt himself utterly helpless. A friend called in the afternoon and told him of the ready preparations for the inaugural service of the evening. When the door had closed again behind that man, Stringer rose from his armchair trembling and gasping for breath. He went to the window, and with quivering fingers pushed aside the little muslin curtains. A heavy snow-storm was abroad. He had barely strength to return to his chair. How was the mighty fallen!

The evening came, and Stringer listened with aching ear for the first chime of the new bells. When at last they pealed out into the night their message of glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men, the pent-up agony in Stringer's heart

burst its confines, and the Midland bulldog, alone and ill, without child or friend to speak a word of cheer to him on this eve of the day of all men's joy, sat down in his chair with the first tears he had known since childhood running down his face.

CHAPTER XXV.

THEY said in the village, that night of Christmas Eve, that within the memory of the oldest inhabitant there had not been such a heart-touching solemnity in Thorbury Church. The Lord's blind servant recited the Lord's words, and in his Master's name blessed the whole congregation. Men and women felt struck with awe on beholding those sightless eyes turned towards them in exhortation and prayer. The Rector's delivery had always been impressive, but that evening it had been majestic. He had moved about the church as if guided by a hand from above, and the superstitious country folk saw in Dr. Hay's unaided service something wondrous indeed.

Had any stranger penetrated within the walls of the Rectory, he would never have dreamed that a sore affliction had befallen its master. The place was bright and happy. The Squire was there in his jolliest of tempers, and Frank, glowing with ecstasy at being so near Ophelia — a feeling which the young lady returned with interest. There was Mrs. Hay — of course, her face a little pale still, but content to see her husband restored to strength, if not to sight, and happy that the young folk were so happy. And then there was the Rector, with his unbreakable good humor, insisting on walking about without help, full of anecdote, smiling as if naught had befallen him, with a good word for all men, and a kindly one even for Stringer. It was a Christmas-Eve

gathering of the cheery, homely sort, where men's virtues were remembered, and their shortcomings were cast into the snow that covered the ground.

They had of course heard that Stringer was very ill, and Dr. Hay would have dearly liked to visit him. In the simplicity of his great heart, he had no misgivings whatever about the reception which would await him, and he was with difficulty persuaded to abandon his project, accepting as a compromise that the Squire should first put his head into the lion's den, and call upon the sick and irreconcilable churchwarden.

Christmas Day came, bright, fine, crisp, and glorious. The snow glittered upon ground, roof, and tree with millions upon millions of shiny white crystalline points. The sun, large and red, stood out behind a long streak of purple cloud on a horizon of the coldest, palest blue. On the frozen ditch alongside the high-road, between the village inn and the village church, the young population of Thorbury was sliding with keen enjoyment which even an occasional rough tumble could not mar.

Mr. Stringer was a little better that morning — just so much better as to be endowed with the energy to grumble at and scold the poor old woman who nursed him. The latter had been making some mince-pies, which she fondly believed her master would be able to eat. She had presented one of them to Mr. Stringer, and had been met with rebuke and reproach. Thereupon she had fled from the churchwarden's presence in fear and trembling, and the sick man, miserable at being left quite alone, would have called her back had he been able to speak loud enough to make himself heard, or had he been strong enough to walk downstairs unaided.

A bell, even for a sick-room, was not a contrivance known in Mr. Stringer's house.

To Isaac Stringer this glorious Chistmas Day was the blackest, the most miserable day he had ever known. Sore at heart, prostrated by bodily illness and mental disappointment, he felt ready to curse himself and others.

He had ordered a big fire to be lighted in the parlor, and with Susan's aid he descended thither laboriously, wrapped in a pair of voluminous blankets, and sat himself down by the window, so that he might see the people who passed.

The one street of Thorbury was at the best of times nearly deserted, and Stringer lived in that part of it which owned no traffic but that of its own locality. The road from the railway-station reached the street a good three or four minutes' walk from Stringer's house, and the avenue which led to Thorbury Chase turned off some distance further on. The end of the village street in which Mr. Stringer lived led only by an old circuitous and unfrequently used country road to Castle Barfield, and had long been bereft of its traffic by the newer and much shorter turnpike. Few people who had not actual business there ever came to Mr. Stringer's part of the village. Passers were, therefore, few and far between, even on ordinary occasions.

As Mr. Stringer sat and looked out of his window, he vowed that he had never seen the place so deserted on a Christmas morning. Did nobody at all walk abroad in the village? Had nobody business in the street? Had everybody utterly forgotten him? Was nobody going to call on him? Did anybody at all care whether he was alive or dead? The clock in its long

case in the corner of the room was ticking solemnly — tick, tick, tick, tick. It seemed to him, at last, as though that clock mocked him, and answered him — No, no, no, no. At other times that clock would have worried and fidgeted him frightfully, but the exertion of coming downstairs had sadly weakened him again, and he did not feel strong enough to be annoyed.

On a sudden, bright, cheery voices fell on Isaac Stringer's ear — a big, jolly, elderly voice, and a younger one; and Stringer knew them both. They were the Squire's and his son's. But a moment or two afterwards, Marmaduke Boyer's florid face and red hair and whiskers beamed in upon Mr. Stringer from the other side of his parlor window, and the churchwarden felt as though he could drop at the thought that they who had injured him so much were actually about to set foot in his house. But a few heart-beats elapsed between the time when he first caught sight of the Squire's face and that when he heard the latch click under Boyer's hand, but those few moments sufficed for him to pass in mental review all he had suffered, as he imagined, at the Rector's hands, and to steel his poor shattered nerves, with such strength as was left to him, so as to receive with fitting dignity his enemy's declared friends.

The parlor door swung open, and Boyer and Frank stepped in.

"Glad to see you up again, Stringer," the Squire commenced cheerily.

Stringer looked at him with open eyes, without moving hand or foot.

"Indeed?" he drawled slowly.

"Indeed I am," Boyer rejoined, "and so are all of us."

We heard all about your illness, and I thought I'd come here this morning, and see how you were, and wish you a merry Christmas."

"That's very kind of you, Squire," Stringer replied, in a tone of voice so studiously indifferent that it left his speech without point.

Boyer noticed it, as he had previously noticed the man's manner, but he was determined to humor him if such were possible.

"We all wished," continued the Squire, "that you could have been in the church last night. It was a beautiful service, and you would have been pleased with it, Stringer."

"Oh, I would ha' been pleased? Would I?" Mr. Stringer snarled in reply. "Well, theer ain't no knowin' what might ha' been. Pigs might fly—that's an old sayin'."

"Come now, come," the Squire replied, with a round laugh, "we won't have any more of this nonsense, and especially not at this jolly Christmas time."

"Oh, of course," Mr. Stringer retorted, "it's nonsense now. You've found that out just lately, Squire, since I've been ill abed, and hunable to do my duty by my parish. It weren't nonsense three months ago. And this Christmas time is so jolly, ain't it, Squire?"

"My poor Stringer," the Squire said gently, "I don't blame you for speaking as you do. You're ill, and lonely, and miserable, and —"

"And what's that got to do with thee, Squire?" Stringer interrupted sternly. "If I am ill, and lonely, and miserable, I've got just as much right to be ill, and lonely, and miserable as hanybody else. What's it got to do with thee? That don't give you no right to come

here and badger me. And what's more, I won't be badgered — I ain't well enough to be badgered — ”

“My dear Stringer!” Marmaduke Boyer tried to say.

“Oh! I know all you're goin' to say, Squire,” the irate one responded, “and with your leave, I'll tek it as spoke. It's very good on you to come here and look up a poor man like me, but if you don't mind I'd rather be left alone.”

Boyer looked at the churchwarden with his great blue eyes twinkling in brimming good humor.

“Look here, Stringer,” he said. “I am not going to allow you to bite off your nose to spite your face. You're not getting better very fast, and” — here his eyes twinkled more than ever — “the parish can't get on without you, Stringer.”

Stringer's face at this statement was a study for a painter. It presented a mixture of injured innocence and outraged dignity.

“Do you think, Squire,” said Stringer, in a slow staccato, “as it's very neighborly and Christian-like on a Christmas Day, of all days in the year, to come here and make fun of a man what's ill?”

With these words he turned his face away and looked out of window. Boyer stepped round to the other side, and, by doing so, compelled the obstinate one to look him in the face.

“Tell me, Stringer,” he said in a threatening quiet, “do you think me capable of coming here for the purpose of annoying you?”

Mr. Stringer, placed between the Scylla of confessing himself in fault and the Charybdis of silence, chose the latter, and again turned his eyes out of window.

“You won't reply?” Boyer asked in the same tone.

Stringer remained as motionless and as voiceless as before.

"Very well," Marmaduke Boyer said, turning towards the door, "it isn't my fault if you insist upon quarrelling with me, as you quarrel with everybody. Goodness knows I came here with the best of intentions, but, man, you would make a saint swear."

Frank, who saw that his father was fast losing his temper, and who knew what sort of a scene that would lead to, took the Squire by the arm, and said :

"Come, let us go away. The man is ill and worried. He's better by himself."

Boyer, for all reply, rammed his hat on to his head and went out. Frank followed him.

Now, it may seem strange, but it is, nevertheless, a fact, that Mr. Stringer rejoiced greatly at the result of his interview with the Squire. Nothing so pleasant had occurred to him for a long time. He had lately got quite out of practice in bullying. Susan was a very poor subject, who gave him no chance. She would cry and walk away before he had half begun. But as he retraced, in his mind, his interview with Marmaduke Boyer, he awoke to a justifiable pride for having, after his own fashion, bullied and defeated no less a person than the Squire himself. In his weak bodily state he felt as happy as he knew how to be in assuring himself that he was the undoubted conqueror in that passage of arms.

When his slender midday meal was brought he felt himself endowed with the first sign of an appetite he had known these weeks past, and actually ate the meat of half a wing of roast chicken. He had given the Squire more than he had bargained for. The Rector's

turn would come in due time. He would soon be better and able to be about again, and then the village of Thorbury would have to choose between maligned honesty and pretentious trickery. He felt so much better, even at that moment, that he had no misgiving about the result.

He had his chair moved to the side of the glowing fire, and was half dozing, in tranquil recollection of the morning's victory, when the lad who did service as village postman pushed open the door, and with a noisy "A Merry Christmas to you, Mr. Stringer," brought him a letter.

The boy stood waiting while Stringer turned the missive over and over again, examining the postmark — London — and the writing — Mary's.

"And what might you be waitin' for, young man?" he said at last, on looking up.

"A Christmas-box, if you please, Mr. Stringer," the lad answered.

If Stringer had been possessed of his usual strength and agility, unless both doors were open to permit of rapid flight, that boy would not have escaped punishment for his impertinent request. As it was, Stringer looked about him helplessly for some cheap, tough, and handy article with which to assault the lad. The latter understood the churchwarden's intentions perfectly, and beat a hasty retreat.

The letter lay a full quarter of an hour in Stringer's lap before he opened it. It seemed to bring him closer to her, that letter, and yet he had an inward misgiving that it did not contain welcome news. Perhaps it was his own bodily condition; perhaps it was the state of doubt by which he had been lately surrounded — he

could not have told why ; but he was afraid to open that letter, lest it might convey to him aught about Mary that would grieve him.

When the epistle at last lay open before him, he found that either his eyesight was not as good as of yore, or that the light in the room was execrably bad, and before he was able to read it he was so shaken that he had to renew his effort twice or thrice before reaching the end.

Mary's handwriting seemed quite different from what he had been accustomed to. It seemed straighter, less rounded, more irregular, as if she had been writing under great nervous agitation.

MY DEAR FATHER, she wrote, I send you my very best wishes for this Christmas and New Year. I hope you do not miss me as much as I miss you, and that you are happier than I am. How awful about poor Joseph ! I have done all I can to help him. Of course he is quite innocent. God bless you, dear father, this Christmas-tide.

Your affectionate daughter,

MARY.

What an inexplicable letter ! It was so altogether vague ; it seemed steeped in unhappiness.

Mary was miserable ; something awful had happened to Joseph. He had been accused of something of which he was not guilty. What did it all mean ?

He would inquire, and that quickly too, and find out all about this. But how ? He was unable to leave his chair without help. And this was his Christmas ! He so helpless here, and his child far away from him and unhappy.

As he was pondering in his mind what to do in this emergency, his eyes fell upon a square-cut scrap of a

newspaper, which had evidently been enclosed to him, and had fallen from Mary's letter on to his lap. He had to turn it once or twice before he could find the right side, and his throat became parched and his pulse seemed to stand still while he read the following lines :

BURGLARS' ACCOMPLICES. — At the Rochester Row Police-court, Cornelius Badger, 24, commercial traveller, of 116 Broad Street, Chelsea, and Joseph Stringer, 21, a private in the Life Guards, were brought up by Detective Sergeant Humphry, charged with being in possession of a portion of the property stolen from Herndale House on the occasion of the recent burglary. Formal proof of their possession of the stolen articles was given, and the prisoners, through Mr. Andrews, their solicitor, declared their innocence. Mr. Somers remanded the prisoners for a week, in order to enable the police to make further inquiries. Bail was refused.

Stringer read the extract word for word, and staggered under each word as under a blow.

Great Heaven ! his own son charged with dire dishonesty ! His honorable name threatened by a tarnish ! He, who had held his head so high ! Surely he had not deserved this.

How was he to look his neighbors in the face again ?

When the old woman came to him, about an hour afterwards, he was sitting there, still and stony, and allowed himself to be led upstairs like a child.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE back kitchen of the People's Emporium in Marlborough Road, Chelsea, was not of that spacious nor of that luxurious kind which would make it a desirable locality for a Christmas gathering. Its furniture consisted of the usual dresser and set of shelves — not overstocked just then even with kitchen utensils — the usual plain deal table, and half a dozen more or less broken and rickety Bristol chairs. A broken looking-glass, about twice the size of a man's hand, was the only offering to female vanity the place afforded. The back door opened into a small paved yard, a great portion of which was occupied by an overstocked dust-bin, and by a huge assortment of broken bottles, china, and glass-ware and other equally useless odds and ends. Across the dark and dirty brown of the bricks of the back wall the bare branches of a solitary plane shot up against a bit of murky sky, breaking the edge of a gloomy, equally dirty, four-story tenement. That tree looked so thoroughly out of place where it stood that one might have fancied it to have been dropped there by mistake, and to have been forgotten there. The sparse fire in the kitchen grate was subjected to the double duty of warming the room and of roasting a diminutive joint which dangled in front of it suspended from a hook in the chimney-board.

On the other side of the back kitchen the Emporium itself was closely shuttered and barred, and yet Mrs.

Noble might have left its doors wide open and very few people would have thought its contents worth stealing. The poor old woman had fallen upon evil times. The unfortunate endorsement of a bill, given gratuitously, and for the sole purpose of aiding a sick friend, had brought writ, judgment, execution, and seizure of goods upon her, and upon this day of Christmas she found her house encumbered, and by a legal fiction guarded, by a broker's man, thrust upon her by her unsatisfied landlord.

The back kitchen of the Emporium was occupied at that moment by only one person, who busied himself in spinning and turning the small joint, so that each portion of it might benefit from the heat of the sparse fire. He was a small man, elderly, with a shock of coarse gray hair. His long upper lip made a feeble pretence of being shaven, and his gray mutton-chop whiskers drooped over upstanding collars of dubious white. His cheeks were baggy, and, like his bluish red nose, formed the subsoil of a crop of pimples.

He shuffled about the room with slouching gait, his movements being impeded by the sole of one boot which had parted company from its upper. He searched a drawer in the kitchen dresser, and thence produced a clean table-cloth, which he spread over the kitchen table. Then he laid the table for three, with such humble utensils as were ready to his hand. Having completed his task, he placed one of the chairs before the fire with its back to the chimney, and sat himself down upon it cross-ways, resting his arms upon the top rail. He might have sat like that for a quarter of an hour, during which time he assiduously kept the small joint spinning, when he got tired of his position and walked about the place,

returning to the grate from time to time to give the joint a new start. Then he went to the back door, which he opened, and sniffed the brisk winter air. The operation seemed not to cheer him particularly, for he slammed the door in a hurry and resumed his tramp up and down.

“Well, well,” he grumbled to himself, “hit’s too bad. I wonder whether they hever his a-coming ’ome. They hain’t kept them at Clerkenwell, I s’pose. This ’ere jint ’ll be done to a cinder, and I ham that ’ungry —”

He picked a tiny morsel of the crisp brown skin off the joint, and bit and ate it, hot as it was, and then walked up and down again.

Fully half an hour more elapsed before a faint double knock was heard at the outer shutters, and the little old man slouched to the door and opened it, admitting Mrs. Noble and Mary.

They both walked straight into the back kitchen and sat themselves down. Mrs. Noble placed a small basket filled with various parcels, on the table. Mary was paler, but not less pretty, than she had been before. She sat there silently, with clasped hands and mutely appealing eyes.

“You hain’t got rid o’ them things?” said the man, pointing to the basket.

“No, Mister Jones,” Mrs. Noble replied. “We’ve had all our long walk for nothin’. They wouldn’t let us see Joseph, and they wouldn’t let us leave nothing. We’ve got to go agin to-morrow mornin’, and it’s heart-breakin’, that’s what it is.”

Mary put her handkerchief to her eyes and wiped away a silent tear. Mrs. Noble went to her and put her arms round her neck.

“Don’t go on, dearie,” she said softly. “Don’t take on like that. Don’t cry no more. Joseph won’t have no difficulty to prove as he’s had no hand in it, and that filthy little snake of a Badger deserves all he’ll get, an’ more.”

“You mustn’t say that, Grannie Noble,” Mary replied, turning her face up towards the old woman and kissing her. “Joseph is innocent, of course — that we all know. But there is no proof whatever that Mr. Badger is guilty any more than Joseph.”

“My dear child, how can you say so?” Mrs. Noble retorted with emphasis. “The little sneak! The mean thief! I knowed as he were no good the moment I set eyes on him. He not guilty? He what brought our Joseph into this, and what give us all this worry an’ cryin’ to spoil our Christmas — as if it wasn’t miserable enough already with the brokers in, an’ as poor as we are. Didn’t *he* give your brother them rings what his pals stole at that theer gentleman’s house? If *he* knowed nothin’ about that, you may call me a fool. But don’t you cry no more about it, my dearie, but let’s sit down an’ have a bit of something to eat, for you ain’t touched a morsel since yesterday, that you haven’t — not as big as a walnut. And just take your bonnet off, my dearie, and dry your eyes. Theer, now, theer.” The kindly old woman finished her speech with a couple of hearty kisses.

“Now, miss,” chimed in Mr. Jones, “the jint’s been a-spilin’ this *hour* or more, and if you don’t want to eat charcoal, ‘hookey sharp’ ’s the word.”

Mary took off her bonnet and shawl without saying a word, and joined Mrs. Noble and Mr. Jones at the table. The broker’s man was evidently on very good

terms with the ladies, and, as a matter of fact, was anything but a bad-hearted fellow. His path of life lay among the poor. He was poor himself; a crippled wife and five hungry children were continually crying for bread and clothes in his third-floor lodging in Russell Street, Drury Lane. He had been a tradesman in a small way of business once, and had himself known what it was to have the brokers in. In spite of ungainliness of figure and feature, he was more comic than unpleasant to look at, and to the two lonely and sorrowing ladies his presence, at this trying time, was rather a relief than otherwise.

Mary made but a faint pretence of eating her dinner. She ate a piece of mutton about the size of a shilling, then laid down her knife and fork on each side of her plate. Mr. Jones, who sat at Mary's right, first drank his own glass of four ale, and then, Mary's glass being equally handy, he emptied that, and she never perceived it.

Mrs. Noble was in sad distress that her charge could not be induced to partake of sufficient food, but the girl simply kissed her on the forehead, and stroked her gray hairs.

"You must not trouble about me, Grannie Noble," she said. "You must really not. I do not feel a bit hungry. I have eaten all I want, and all I need, and, if you don't mind, I'll go upstairs to my room, and just lie down a bit, for I feel very, very tired."

Mary's bedroom was on the first floor, the best one in the house, and the only one that retained anything like its original amount of furniture. It was as neat and as clean as the daintiest of housekeeping could make it, and a brighter little nest for a young girl in

an humble station of life would not easily be found in Chelsea, or Fulham either.

Mary relieved herself of her walking-dress, and replaced it by a colored print frock. She untied a wealth of light brown hair, and laid herself down upon her bed, hoping to sleep.

Fortune had not favored poor Mary since she had left her father's house. She had tried hard to find a situation, and for a long time had failed. When at last one presented itself, Grannie Noble was ill in bed, having been prostrated by her great trouble and loss. Mary had it not in her heart to leave Grannie to face the storm alone, and her chance of obtaining a situation passed by and was lost.

In the meantime, Mr. Cornelius, brought to the house by her brother Joseph, had been a constant visitor at the People's Emporium. Grannie Mag disliked him instinctively, and was neither slow nor chary in expressing her opinion. The good-natured, good-humored Joseph, however, assured his sister that Badger was "one o' the right sort — as decent a chap as ever stepped, though a little 'un" — and Mary, whose innate maidenly and lady-like instincts were becoming rather shocked by Mr. Badger's over-accentuated mannerisms, accepted her brother's advice with the confidence she would have placed in her father. Mr. Cornelius paid his addresses to her, and Mary hesitatingly tolerated a sort of distant courtship, with the idea that her brother wished her to like his boon companion, and that perhaps, some day, she might perceive qualities in Mr. Badger which would replace the illusions — long since vanished — which she had indulged in concerning the young man on their first acquaintance.

It was, perhaps, lucky for Mary, under the circumstances which the reader now knows, that she had always emphatically declined to accept any of the numerous presents which Mr. Cornelius had, from time to time, brought to Marlborough Road. Mr. Badger stated his profession as a traveller in the jewelry line, doing a considerable private trade on his own account, and he invariably carried, stowed away in various portions of his wearing apparel, little boxes, cases, and parcels containing watches and jewelry. Mrs. Noble had noticed that, when Mr. Badger first came to her house, the quality of the goods which formed Mr. Badger's stock was of the cheap and flashy kind, but later on it improved wonderfully, until at last diamonds, rubies, and other gems of considerable value were frequently seen among his goods. To the shrewd old woman his rapid increase of fortune seemed suspicious, and she stated her opinion plain and straight to Mary, and warned both Joseph and her against him. The big young fellow, however, laughed at her, and called her a silly old Grannie, and told her that his friend Badger would in a very short time open a shop in the Brompton Road. "And I know a young lady," he added, with a sly wink, "as will be mistress of that shop before she can say Jack Robinson, if she'll only hold up her little finger."

"Then I just hope as she won't hold up her little finger," Grannie replied fiercely. "I'd rather see her married to a coal-heaver or a brewer's drayman than to that cringin' little whipper-snapper of a friend of yours — theer!"

One day, then barely a fortnight ago, Joseph came to Marlborough Road the proud wearer of two valuable

single-stone diamond rings. To Mary's and Mrs. Noble's anxious inquiries as to how he came possessed of such property, he replied that he had had them given to him by Mr. Badger for the purpose of disposing of them, if possible, among his officers, and that there was no harm, he thought, if he wore them in the meantime. The explanation seemed satisfactory, and the ladies thought no more about the business until the awful news came to them that Joseph was a prisoner in Rochester Row police-station. To Grannie Noble's mind, the only bit of comfort about the horrible news was that Mr. Cornelius was the life-guard'sman's companion in durance vile.

"I knew what it would come to," she said; "I felt sure on it. If they'll only hang that little scoundrel and let your brother go, I'll think it all a good job."

Justice, however, was not the least disposed to treat the prisoners so arbitrarily or so unequally, and Mary was carried fainting from the crowded court-room when the jailers removed her brother. Since that moment her life had been a sort of half-trance. She did things and forgot that she had done them, and imagined she had done things which she had utterly omitted. Somehow or other she had got it in her mind that she had written to her father on the very first shock of Joseph's imprisonment, but, poor thing! she had postponed it hourly, hoping that each passing short space of time might enable her to send better news. When she wrote to her father, at last, she had quite forgotten that she had not written before, and thus her letter became so vaguely worded.

There are few female constitutions in which hysteria is not more or less latent. The robust, country-bred

girl is perhaps less liable to it than her town sister, but, given favoring circumstances, the malady may show itself where least suspected.

Mary was a courageous girl, but the load of shame and despair conveyed by her brother's arrest on an infamous charge weighed her down completely. She had no doubt whatever of her brother's innocence, but she had most dire misgivings as to whether he would be able to prove it. The evidence of the detectives, given with relentless precision and directness, left uncontradicted by her brother, the surroundings of the court, the squalor which she met there, the rough manners of the officers in charge, the crying women who sat in corners,—all made a terrible impression upon her, and her little mind was overburdened and crushed down by the thought, What would become of her father and her if Joseph were condemned? She imagined to herself the effect upon her father—he who had been so unyieldingly proud, so sternly honest.

Her thoughts whirled and whirled in her brain, while she lay upon her bed with her face to the wall, and cried bitterly. They rushed upon and chased one another, they intermingled and passed one another, and at last, they became mixed up in hopeless confusion. There was no loving or sympathetic voice near by to call her from the chaos of her self-communings. There was no friendly hand to shake her, roughly if need be, when she turned round on her bed and commenced to laugh hysterically in heart-breaking, tiny little silvery peals, very much resembling those of an amused, quaint child, vague and vacant, over and over again repeated, and only interrupted, now and then, by an effort to repress the fast-flowing tears.

Over an hour elapsed before Grannie Noble, cautiously walking upstairs, opened Mary's door to see if she were asleep, and fearful lest she might wake her. The girl was lying with her face towards the door, and there was such a heart-breaking expression in it that the old woman started back with a shriek.

"For Heaven's sake, child, what's the matter with ye? What has happened?"

Mary, still looking at her through her tears, wrung her hands.

"My brother isn't a thief," she babbled, in a small whimpering voice. "He never stole. He is not a thief. And you mustn't lock him up. And you mustn't say he did it. He is not a thief, really. If you ask them down at Thorbury they will tell you he is not a thief. He is my brother. And we are honest people. And we would never steal. It's a shame to say he's a thief. A great shame, a crying shame. And those rough men have no right to take him away. I'll write to the Queen about it, that I will. Joseph always was honest, and nobody ever could say a word against him."

And so on in heart-breaking, disjointed hysteric babble.

Mrs. Noble, after looking at Mary for a minute or two with her hands held to the sides of her own aching head, flew downstairs, and, without bonnet or shawl, rushed to the door.

"Where hare you goin' to like this?" the broker's man inquired in surprise.

"I am going to run for a doctor," the old woman replied, half out of breath already; "I'm afeard my poor little Mary is going mad."

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEWSPAPERS from London did not reach the country so quickly in those days as they do now, but the transmission was speedy enough for the village of Thorbury to be in a state of fever that afternoon. The burglary at Herndale House had been planned and carried out with so much daring as to attract the attention of the whole country, and anything relating to it was eagerly read everywhere. The London newspapers had reported Joseph's Stringer's appearance before the magistrate, and the Birmingham journals had naturally copied that report. These reached Thorbury by the train which brought Mary's letter to her father, and, as bad news always travels very fast, before half an hour was over there was not a man, woman, or child in the village who was unaware of the fact that their churchwarden's son was in prison on a charge of felony.

The news reached the Rector, his family, and the Squire, while they were all sitting in the dining-room over their unfinished Christmas dinner. The butler, holding a folded newspaper in his hand, marked a place on it with his finger, and gave it to Mrs. Hay.

"That's queer news, marm," he said quietly, and walked away.

They all knew Joseph, and all felt equally sure he was implicated in the business by some terrible mistake. Both the Rector and the Squire vowed him a straightforward, honest, manly lad, too dull for practised ras-

cality. If he were at all connected in the crime it must be as an unconscious tool of clever rogues.

The Squire had related, after a fashion of his own, the upshot of his interview with Stringer, and Frank had given a humorous description, which he illustrated by mimicking the doughty churchwarden. Marmaduke Boyer's murmurings notwithstanding, it had been resolved that new overtures should be made to Mr. Stringer, and, with the present terrible news before them, they formed themselves into a council for the purpose of deciding in which way they might most efficiently assist poor Joseph. They arrived at the conclusion that some one — Frank was the person selected — should once more venture into Mr. Stringer's redoubtable presence to offer assistance.

When Frank reached the churchwarden's house, he found the place absolutely silent, and to all appearance deserted. He went into the front parlor, into the back room in which Mr. Stringer usually transacted his ordinary business, into the kitchen, into the pantry. He looked out into the yard, and shouted upstairs, without seeing anybody or hearing a sound. A bright fire was burning in the kitchen grate and another in the parlor, but beyond the slight occasional crackling of these everything was as silent as death.

The fact was that Susan, frightened at her master's appearance, had gone out in search of advice, and thus had left both Stringer and the house unguarded.

Frank, after repeatedly raising his voice to attract attention, went into the hall and groped his way up the stairs. He felt for and opened a door, and found himself in a bright, cheery, well-furnished, unoccupied room. It had been Mary's, and Stringer had it kept as

it was on the day when his daughter left him. Frank quickly closed the door again, and tried another. This time he had hit the right place, for Stringer's motionless eyes stared him in the face. A white coverlet was drawn tightly to his neck, and with his nightcap on his head, and with his usually rotund and florid face gone white, with his mouth wide open, gaping unconsciously, and an air of terrible vacancy settled all over him, he looked ghastly. The gray light of the winter afternoon streamed in above the short curtains of the window, and aided in setting off distinctly his pallor and gauntness.

"I am sorry, indeed, Mr. Stringer," Frank commenced; and then stopped, seeing that the man continued to look at him with the same awful vacant stare. "I found nobody about the place, and could make nobody hear," he continued; and Stringer's eyes kept themselves fastened upon him as before.

The young man was at a loss how to proceed. Stringer gave no sign of life but that fixed glare, and for all that meant the man might be dead. Frank approached nearer to the bed, and Stringer, with a convulsive movement, drew his limbs more tightly together beneath the sheets.

"I am glad of that," Frank muttered to himself. "He isn't dead — that's one thing certain. But it isn't a bit of good to talk to him now."

He was relieved in his mind on hearing the noise of an opened door downstairs. Susan appeared a moment or two afterwards, with the village physician, who declared Mr. Stringer to be in a state of high fever. It was therefore useless for Frank to remain, and he returned to the Rectory, where the news he brought created a profound impression.

Stringer was a prey to delirium and high fever for the whole of the following night, and the day and night that followed. He was a little better on the day after that, but he could not yet quite appreciate what was passing around him. There was one circumstance he could not understand at all, and he thought he was dreaming. A pleasant, sweet-faced young lady was sitting by his bedside, waiting upon him, with delicate fingers smoothing his pillow — not his Mary, but just as gentle, as soft-voiced, and as fair. He knew her and he did not know her, and he was satisfied to let matters be where they were, and be attended to and cared for by that ministering angel. And there was generally an elderly lady with her, and he could have sworn it was Mrs. Dr. Hay, only he had no feeling of spite against her at all, and how could it be Mrs. Dr. Hay if he did not hate her? But the most amazing portion of his dream came when the Rector himself entered his room, and with closed eyes seemed to look at him, and sat himself down by his bedside and spoke to him kindly, without a reproach of any kind in voice or tone, and as if nothing whatever had happened between them, and he — that made him feel certain he was dreaming — felt no spite against the Rector either, no sentiment of any kind, one way or the other.

He felt no spite against anybody. He felt weary of the world and of everything, and was quite willing to let people have their own way, as long as they did not trouble him, and were kind and nice to him as everybody was at that moment. He did not feel annoyed even when old Susan dropped the teaspoon on to the floor — and it made clatter and noise enough to frighten a dozen men, he thought — and he never uttered a word

of reproach, never thought about doing so, when she spilled quite a quarter of a teaspoonful of his medicine on the coverlet.

A day more passed like that, and another, and on the morning of the day after that Mrs. Hay and Ophelia, entering the parlor of Mr. Stringer's house, were met by the old woman.

"How is Mr. Stringer?" they asked.

"Oh, he's better, ladies. He's wonderful better. He's been abusin' me all mornin' like a pickpocket. I know he's better. He's been chuckin' things about. I'm so glad, that I am!"

"Well, shall we go upstairs and see him?" Mrs. Hay asked Ophelia.

"Don't you go, ladies; don't you go," Susan exclaimed in a fright. "He'd bite your heads off. He *can* go on when he likes, Mr. Stringer can. He don't mind what he's a-sayin' either, nor who he's a-sayin' it to, and he'll make no more bones about flyin' out on you — theer."

"Well, Susan," replied Mrs. Hay, "will you go upstairs and tell Mr. Stringer that we have come to inquire about him and are glad to hear he is better?"

The old woman shook her head as in misgiving, but she toddled upstairs nevertheless. Directly afterwards they could hear Mr. Stringer's strident voice raised as though in anger, followed by the rapid closing of a door and Susan reappeared in a state of utter discomfiture.

"Why, what has happened?" Mrs. Hay inquired. "You are trembling. What did Mr. Stringer say?"

"I don't like to tell you, ladies," the housekeeper answered timidly.

“We are prepared for the worst,” Ophelia cried, with a pretty laugh. “What *did* Mr. Stringer say?”

“He said,” Susan stammered — “he said, ‘Thank you for nothin’, and the sooner they gets out o’ my house the better I’ll like it.’”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Hay, “Mr. Stringer is decidedly better. He is becoming quite himself again. We need not fear to leave him in Susan’s hands now.”

That Mr. Stringer was decidedly and astonishingly better the preceding incident has proved. His bull-dog disposition began to assert itself, and his recovery was so rapid as to amaze the local physician.

But with the increase of the strength of his body and mind came also the re-perception and appreciation of the misfortune which had befallen him through Joseph.

But his wits were quick now, as they had always been, and, being well acquainted with the usual course of criminal prosecutions, he had no difficulty in picturing to himself the state at which Joseph’s case had arrived by that time.

“He’s been committed for trial,” he said to himself; “that’s certain, whether he’s guilty or whether he’s not. And they won’t have taken no bail, neither — that’s sure again. So there’s bin no time lost. What they want is money to pay the lawyers, and all sorts o’ things. I did take a hoath that he’d never have a ha’penny o’ mine again, but one can’t let one’s own flesh and blood go to penal servitude without raisin’ a hand to help him — so I suppose I’ve got to do it.”

He was able to walk about his bedroom, slowly and with an effort, of course, and he went to a small cupboard in the corner, which he unlocked. Within that cupboard, secured to the bricks of the wall, was an iron

box. He opened this also, and from a small sheaf of bank-notes he took two of ten pounds each. Then he closed and locked again both the box and the cupboard.

The next step — that of writing a letter — was not so easy. Neither the pen, nor the paper, nor the ink, was to his liking, and four sheets travelled into the fire before he could express himself as he liked.

MY DEAR MARY, he wrote at last. I'm ill else would have written before I send 20 pound I don't send it for Joseph I would not send him a farthing not one but I send it to you and if you like to help your brother with it thats your bisness and not mine

Your affectionate father

ISAAC STRINGER.

Marlborough Road was steeped in an intense, horrid black fog on the morning when Stringer's letter reached the People's Emporium. Gaslights were flaring in windows and shops, and the rare pedestrians flitted about the street like phantoms.

In the back parlor of the empty shop Mrs. Noble was sitting before the fireless grate, holding in her hand a doctor's prescription, and looking at it in silent, tearless grief. The chemist demanded two and threepence before he would deliver the medicine, and Mrs. Noble had not a fourth of that sum. And there was Mary lying upstairs, but barely and slowly recovering. She ought to have had that medicine two hours ago.

Grannie Noble was counting her coppers, and proving to herself the long-established fact that six is not twenty-seven, when the door was pushed open blithely, and the postman appeared on the threshold.

"Miss Mary Stringer," he shouted. "A registered letter. Sixpence to pay."

Grannie Noble was not long in recognizing Isaac Stringer's handwriting, and she flew upstairs as fast as her old legs could carry her.

"A letter from your father, my dear," she cried. "A registered one."

When Mary opened the letter and those two notes fell out, oh, what a joy welled there to the old woman's heart!

"You shall have your medicine, now," she cried, "and your fire, and your beef-tea. And we shall soon have the roses back to your cheeks again, and you'll be as well as ever."

"Ah," replied Mary, in her weak, small voice, "but remember poor Joseph. We must help him, and immediately too. Didn't I tell you that my father was the best father in the world?"

"Oh, he's good enough at the bottom," Grannie Noble replied, "only one's got to take a pickaxe to get at it!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONE morning the Rector received a letter from Saint Sauveur. For months past there had been no organ, and the post of organist of Thorbury Church was, therefore, a sinecure. Saint Sauveur had occupied his time in travelling about the Continent endeavoring to track down Messrs. Reinemann and MacWraith, and to discover the exact facts about the missing Bible. The letter which the Rector received informed him of the partial success of his friend's efforts.

There was no doubt that the Thorbury Bishops' Bible, minus its original binding, was in the possession of a well-known and highly respectable firm of book-sellers in Leipzig. They had purchased the book from another equally well-known and equally highly respectable firm in Berlin. This firm, again, had bought the book from the catalogue of a similarly well-known and similarly respected firm in Paris, and the Parisian house had purchased it, in the ordinary and regular course of business, from a gentleman who lived in good style in one of the Parisian hotels, and whom they had not seen since. The man had been registered in the books of the hotel under a name which was, of course, false; but the description given of his appearance by the clerk of the hotel and the bookseller's employés left no doubt of his identity with Reinemann.

French law is very particular in the matter of second-hand purchases. The buyer is compelled to go to the

seller's lodgings, and to pay for his purchase there. In doing so he is supposed to have assured himself of the identity of the person with whom he is dealing, and of the latter's right of ownership to the article sold. There his responsibility ends. All these conditions had been properly fulfilled by the Paris firm. They had bought the book in the ordinary run of their business, with the ordinary precautions prescribed by law, and to be able to claim the book as stolen property, even if the fact could have been proved without considerable difficulty, Saint Sauveur would have had to set in motion the cumbrous and circumlocutionary machinery of no less than four Foreign Offices, namely, those of England, France, Prussia, and Saxony.

The French firm had paid four thousand francs for the book. They had put it into their catalogue at five thousand five hundred, and had received that sum less ten per cent. discount. The Berlin firm had marked the book at two thousand five hundred thalers. They had been paid for it, and had not allowed the usual trade discount; in fact, there had been some rather angry correspondence on the matter, because the Berlin firm, on discovering the great value and the unique condition of the book, wished to raise its price.

The Leipzig booksellers, probably for the purpose of obtaining a better price by mystifying Saint Sauveur, bethought themselves of a combination of the petty German coinage of the period — for in Saxony at that time both thalers and florins were current — and fixed their price at eight thousand five hundred German florins, or a little over seven hundred pounds English. To Saint Sauveur's remonstrances they replied that they certainly considered Dr. Hay's case very hard, but

that they had come by the book in the course of perfectly straightforward, honest trade, and that the utmost reduction they could make in their price, under the circumstances, would be five hundred florins.

To Dr. Hay this was heavy news. The letter came to him at the breakfast-table, and was read to him by Ophelia.

"Six hundred and fifty pounds!" he murmured. "Six hundred and fifty pounds! How am I to get it? I owe a lot of money to the builders now, and I cannot hope to make up such a sum in the next two years. I must get the book back, however. My honor is involved in that, and the parishioners have a right to expect that I will restore it to them."

"Surely these Germans," said Ophelia, "might forego their profit. They know how you have been robbed, and it seems hard that you should have to pay for the book five hundred pounds more than the rascals themselves obtained."

"I have not the slightest hope that I will succeed in anything of the kind," Dr. Hay replied. "On the contrary, these men know that I am bound to buy the book back, sooner or later, and that I shall have to give whatever they ask. If I could see these people myself, perhaps, I do not know what I might get them to do. But, after all, I cannot blame them. I suppose they consider it fair in business. The whole thing is my fault. I ought to have watched these men more closely."

"My dear Denis, my dear Denis!" Mrs. Hay interposed. "You have nothing whatever to blame yourself about. How could you doubt them after Mr. Matlock's introduction?"

“The fact remains — the fact remains, my dear,” the Rector replied soothingly. “When I came here there was a Bible in that church that had been there nearly since the days of the Reformation. Look at that bracelet on your arm. That’s your dear grandmother’s hair, isn’t it? Suppose that clasp was damaged, and you sent it to Birmingham to the jeweller to be repaired —” his hand was laid gently on his wife’s, and his sightless eyes were turned towards her. He felt for the bracelet, which he knew to be always on her arm, and tapped on it gently. “Now suppose,” he continued, “the jeweller lost or made away with this bracelet, and, in return for this fair silver-streaked braid of hair, he sent you one of a darker shade. Why, he might put a clasp of diamonds on it, and you would feel your loss irretrievable, nevertheless, would you not?”

He could not see that she nodded an affirmative reply, but his senses had become so keen that the slight tremor of the white hand assured him that he was answered.

“Well, you see, my dear,” he continued, “my parishioners have as much right to their Bible as you to your bracelet, and the moment I have these builders off my shoulders I must make an effort to raise the money. We will have to do with less servants, and then you know there is one extravagance I am spared. I can’t ruin myself in books.”

If the Rector’s opportunity for extravagance in books was past, there remained plenty of ways to rid him of his stock of money. The winter was an unusually hard one, and the Rectory pensioners more numerous than ever.

The blind Rector on his rounds of charity was a picture that deserved to dwell in the memory. He stooped

a little more than before, and his tall form seemed to have lost some of its elasticity; his hair had gone whiter and sparser, and he walked more cautiously and more slowly. But his face shone with the best of good-humor, with the brightest contentment, and his great affliction had been unable to cloud a feature. He persisted in his endeavor to walk about unaided — a stick his only help. Of course there were loving arms always ready to protect and guide him; but it pleased him to think he could walk about alone, and those who loved him were happy to allow him to remain thus pleased.

With the loss of his sight, his faculty of hearing and general perception became wonderfully sharpened. He would recognize a step that was inaudible to others. An intonation of the voice gave him the clew to movements of the body, and he was never mistaken about the direction whence a sound proceeded.

He must have been a hard-hearted man, indeed, who could have looked into that sightless face, and not have been struck with pity and reverence. His sermons, now forcedly, absolutely extempore, made an immediate sensation. The restored Thorbury Church received visitors it had not known in the olden days, for people streamed in from all the country-side, to hear the blind preacher's lovely sermons and inspiring service.

No word of complaint ever escaped his lips. All the world was black to him, and yet he looked as cheerful as ever.

"I'd niver know'd as th' Rector weer blind," one old woman said to her gossiping friend, "if thee hadst not told me. His eyes weer closed, to be sure, but he weer so cheery and he larfed so nat'ral, that I cum to think as he did it o' purpose, an' theer was nowt the matter wi' him."

He was as solicitous as ever for the needs of those poor waifs and strays of humanity who had been wont to rely on his charity and goodness. With his usual kindliness of heart and simplicity of nature, he set himself up as a defender of more than one worthless inhabitant of his parish. Among these Jonah Wood ranked foremost.

Jonah had, figuratively speaking, gone thoroughly to the dogs. Since, by his carelessness, Thorbury Church had been destroyed by fire, and the Rector had suffered so grievously, an evil reputation had fastened itself upon Master Wood, and had clung to him like a prison taint. Jonah was not only a ne'er-do-well, but an unlucky one. He was not only always in mischief himself, but the cause of abundant misfortunes to those who employed him. He was not only perpetually without a shilling, but the superstitious country people had heard it rumored, and believed firmly, that pecuniary loss fell upon those who made use of Jonah's services. His name was Jonah, and a Jonah he was.

The only person who would give him anything like regular employment, the Rector, had suffered terribly for his rashness, and there were folk in Thorbury, otherwise sensible people, who said that it was flying in the face of Providence to employ Jonah after so fearful a warning. The result was that no one would employ Jonah, either to hew wood or draw water; and the lad, driven from honest work, took to the use of his time which was most congenial to him, that of poaching. He was caught by the keepers at night-time on enclosed premises, though, luckily for himself, no evidences of actual crime were found about him. The result was a sentence of a month's imprisonment, which nearly broke poor Habakkuk's heart.

Jonah returned from jail lean, pale, and haggard, with his hair cut close, a woe-begone object indeed, and would certainly have fallen back upon his evil practices, to be visited by still greater punishments, had not Dr. Hay paid twelve pounds out of his own pocket, and obtained for the lad an assisted passage to Australia. Even the Stringerites could find no objection to the Rector's course in ridding the parish of so undesirable an inhabitant. They simply expressed an opinion that he would never reach Australia, but that any vessel carrying Master Jonah would go down on the way.

"Twelve pound!" exclaimed one of the churchwarden's partisans. "If I weer captin o' that theer ship I wouldn't take Jonah, no, not fur twelve hundred pound. He'd drown a whale, he would, an' set fire to him in the middle o' the sea arterwards. An' if that ship ever does get to Melbourne, a hearthquake will swallow the place within a week, you see if it don't!"

Luckily for poor Jonah, all the various predictions of evil that were indulged in by the population had no effect upon the Rector, and one morning in January Dr. Hay and Frank were comfortably seated in a first-class carriage travelling to London, while Master Jonah and his worldly goods, consisting of a small wooden box and an untidy parcel from which a pair of boots protruded, were stowed away in a third-class compartment of the same train.

The fast-sailing clipper *Australasia* was lying at the East India Docks waiting to leave the port with nearly four hundred emigrants. The chaplain who sailed in the vessel was an acquaintance of Dr. Hay's, and the good Rector had insisted on personally leaving Jonah

in his charge. He knew the lad to be obstreperous, mischievous, and intolerably lazy, yet not utterly devoid of good qualities; and he wished to make his friend understand the young man's character, so that his faults might be minimized, and such virtues as he possessed made use of.

To this charitable action he devoted nearly an entire day, and when Jonah had been handed over to the good chaplain's care, Dr. Hay and Frank bent their steps westward.

"We mustn't forget poor Joseph Stringer," the Doctor said. "His father was as hard on him as he is towards me."

"As hard?" Frank exclaimed. "As pig-headed and as asinine, you mean, Doctor."

"We have different modes of expressing ourselves, Frank," the Doctor replied; "and if they denote our feelings equally they will serve. It isn't the man's fault; he can no more help it than he can help measuring forty-six inches round the waist."

"There I have you again, Doctor," Frank cried in high glee. "Stringer could as easily reduce his girth as he could get rid of his spitefulness, if he tried."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Doctor; "the Ethiopian cannot change his skin nor the leopard his spots, and we must accept Mr. Stringer as he is given us. We cannot expect him to be kinder to us than he is to his own flesh and blood. I think he would help poor Joseph if he were not too ill, and although I should not like to be in Mr. Stringer's shoes all the year round, I hope he won't think me presumptuous for stepping into them just this once. Besides that, I haven't paid a visit to Grannie Noble since she has been in London. She is a

dear, good old creature and I shall be glad to shake hands with her."

They were in the most crowded part of Fenchurch Street and the Rector walked on Frank's arm as if the world was as full of light to him as to every unit of the busy crowd that surged in the street.

"You had better take a cab, I think, sir, as soon as we can get to the Bank," Frank suggested. "It's a long way to the Fulham Road."

"A long way!" the Doctor replied; "not a yard over four miles, I wager. What do you say to walking there to get up an appetite for dinner?"

The young man consented heartily, and the two shouldered their way through the hive, and soon got into the less densely crowded pavements of Cheapside. Thence along Ludgate Hill, Fleet Street, the Strand, into Pall Mall, and across the Green Park into Chelsea they went with swinging steps at a regular athletic marching pace.

"I wanted to see if I could make you give in," the Rector exclaimed gleefully when they reached Mrs. Noble's door; "but you can walk pretty well, and I shall have to find a younger man than myself to wear you out."

The indomitable endurance of the man spoke in that little thing as in most of his other acts.

A moment afterwards there were such hand-shakings, and such glad tears, and such bashful courtesies, and such proud confusion in the Emporium, and Grannie Noble declared that she didn't know if she was standing on her head or on her heels, and that she had never been so honored in all her born days, and that she would remember that day for all the rest of her life; whilst

Mary, with pale, thin face and languid eyes, tried hard to blush, and had not the strength to succeed, and could only stammer little nothings of thanks. And then, on a sudden, both the old woman and the young noticed the Rector's sightlessness, and they both commenced to cry, and there was much ado before Frank and the Doctor could soothe the pair. Mary had heard all about her father's charge against the Rector and knew that it was the cause of the Doctor's walking into the fire. She felt as if she were partly responsible for his great loss, and here was he who had suffered so much at her father's hands endeavoring to do good to her brother and to her. It required the Rector's kindest persuasion, his softest and gentlest exhortation, to make the poor girl feel at ease in his presence.

"Don't you cry, dearie," Grannie Noble interposed. "It ain't your fault if you've got a bull-head of a father. You can't expect him to treat other folk better than he does his own children. Theer now, dry your eyes. Your cryin' can't wash him clean. Let me get a kettle on the hob. Dr. Hay and Mr. Frank must be starved for a cup o' tea this cold day, and they comin' here afoot, too."

Remonstrances were useless. The good old creature insisted that Dr. Hay and Frank must be frozen nearly to death, and would not accept a refusal. The Emporium still boasted half a dozen nice white gold-rimmed teacups and saucers, and these were produced with a ceremonial befitting the grandeur of the occasion. In less than no time Dr. Hay was able to pursue his inquiries about Joseph, fronted by a steaming dish of toast and flanked by a great brown earthenware teapot, a relic of old Staffordshire, in which — so Grannie Noble

vowed — her great-grandmother had brewed tea before her.

Some time elapsed before Dr. Hay could get such a clear statement of Joseph's case as gave him a fair idea of the latter's prospects of liberation. Mary's remarks were precise and pertinent enough, but she was at every point interrupted by Mrs. Noble, who emphasized and punctuated her phrases with uncomplimentary expressions about Mr. Badger, and with unnecessary statements as to where the Lothario of the oiled locks and the cheap jewelry should for the future reside.

“Portland Jail's too good for him,” the old lady insisted. “A mean, sneakin' little thief, what would have cheated our Mary out of her heart if I hadn't warned her in time, poor thing. And he a-bringin' disgrace, an' shame, an' prison, on poor Joseph, what's as innocent as a babe hunborn, I assure you, gentlemen; an' I'll take my oath afore a judge an' jury as he niver knowed no more as to how that young scamp got them rings, no more than I or you, gentlemen, what knows nothing at all about it. An' he in jail all this time, an' not bein' allowed to speak up for himself, an' the lawyers a set o' fools, I make bold to say, else they would 'a' got him out long ago, an' proved that he niver did it, which is as plain as daylight to hanybody as sees that poor lad's face that he ain't a jail-bird nor a thief neither. Which I'll say that for his father, though I'd hate the sight of him, as he brought up his children respectable, an' honest, an' to make their own livin' with their own 'ands, an' not out of other people's pockets — as I'll not say as much for that scrubby little Badger, as hangin' is too good for.”

The old woman sank back against her chair with her

arms akimbo, and looked around the circle, as if defying contradiction.

“I’ll go and have a talk with the solicitor you are employing,” Dr. Hay said; “and we must put our heads together and see how we can help Joseph when the trial comes. The getting-up and collection of exonerating evidence, and proofs of good character, is a very important matter. I will talk to your solicitor about that. And now, my dear Miss Stringer, you can make your mind easy about one thing. Your father is unwell, and may not be able to be present when the day comes; but your brother shall have one friend from his own village to raise his voice on his behalf, I promise you.”

“There’ll be two of us, Doctor,” Frank chimed in. “Don’t forget me.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

As good-luck would have it, Mary had been able to find a respectable solicitor to undertake her brother's defence. The conduct of ordinary police-court cases is not generally accepted by attorneys of very high standing in their profession; but Mrs. Noble had been able to obtain an introduction from a neighboring wealthy tradesman to a young solicitor in Abingdon Street, Westminster, who had a reputation for clear-headedness, energy, and scrupulous honesty.

Mr. Ambrose Headingly's office was situated on the second floor of a big house which had, in the time of the Georges, served for a family mansion. A wide staircase brought the visitor to a landing, which was flanked on either side by numerous doors.

Dr. Hay and Frank entered one of these, which bore, on a brass plate, the inscription, "A. Headingly. Clerks' Office." It was a spacious room, one half of which was divided off by a high partition, behind which pens could be heard rushing across paper and parchment at confused speeds.

"And what can I do for you, gentlemen?" demanded a perky lad, who barely looked up from the document he was engaged in writing out.

"We want to see Mr. Headingly," Frank replied.

The lad raised his head, and saw before him two gentlemen, one of whom wore the garb of a clergyman of the Church of England. That seemed to him to be

sufficient primary introduction, for he rose and simply asked:

“What business please, gentlemen?”

“We come about the case of Joseph Stringer,” Frank replied.

“Oh, I remember,” the lad answered. “Police-court affair.”

Caution seemed to be a matter of order with him, for he produced a small square scrap of paper, and said:

“Will you please write down here your names, that I may take them to Mr. Headingly?”

The names were scribbled down, and the lad disappeared behind a baize-covered door on the right of the room. A few seconds afterwards he came back.

“Mr. Headingly will see you immediately, gentlemen, if you will kindly step this way,” he said.

They passed through a passage hung with old-fashioned oil-paintings, evidences of departed glories. Another door opened, and Frank and the Rector found themselves in a large room, at the further end of which three windows reached nearly from the ceiling to the ground. In spite of its vastness there was a cosey look about the place. Mr. Headingly was awaiting his visitors, standing behind his desk, and with a wave of the hand motioned them to chairs in front of him. He was a man of about thirty-six years of age, trim and neat, with keen gray eyes, a slightly aquiline nose, and a small dark mustache.

“This is a sad business, I’m afraid, gentlemen,” he said, when Frank had explained the object of their visit. “You see, they prove that this young man was twice seen in the company of one of the actual burglars. We have to prove that he is unconnected with them, and it is most

difficult to prove a negative. Of course we have his *alibi* for the night when the crime was committed, supported by the evidence of his own officers. He seems to bear a generally good character; that is the one thing in his favor. The police are very irritated about this affair, and they will not show him much mercy. His only chance is a full confession by the young scamp who led him into this scrape. That, of course, is problematical at the present moment. His trial will take place next Monday or Tuesday week, and I ought to be in a position to give a retainer, on his behalf, either to Mr. Gregory or to Mr. Warren. They are the best men to defend such a case as this, which depends more upon the impression the counsel can make upon the jury than upon actual evidence."

"That will be an expensive matter, I suppose?" Dr. Hay asked.

"It will cost thirty or forty guineas," the lawyer answered. "But ten guineas will be sufficient for immediate purposes."

"A lot of money, Frank," Dr. Hay rejoined quietly. "A lot of money — especially so just now. But I will have to spare it somehow or other. Have you your check-book with you, Frank? If so, please write out a check for ten guineas, and I will return you the money when we get to Thorbury."

Frank protested that he would be only too glad to pay the money himself, but the Rector would have it his own way.

"I'll take that charge upon myself," he said, "and perhaps one of these days Stringer will pay me back. If he does not — well, I shall have to do without it."

The little slip of paper was handed to Mr. Headingly,

and the solicitor was in the act of proceeding to jot down such evidence of Joseph's good character as Frank and the Rector could suggest, when a gentle tap was heard on the door. The perky lad entered noiselessly, and laid a little slip of paper before his employer.

"If you are not in too great a hurry, gentlemen," said Mr. Headingly, "I would ask you to spare me a minute while I glance over an important document."

Dr. Hay and Frank both assured him that they were not at all pressed for time.

"Show the man in, please," Headingly said to his clerk, and the latter returned a moment afterwards with an old man — a clerk of the better class to all appearances, dressed in irreproachable black. His hair was perfectly white, his face of a grayish hue, and quite clean-shaven. His restless reddish brown eyes wandered nervously all over the room and its occupants. They settled for a moment on Dr. Hay and on Frank, and a slight tremor seemed to shake the man at the time. Dr. Hay's blind face was turned full towards him and he looked at the Rector for a second with a half-frightened gaze, which transformed itself into a sickly smile when he saw that the eyes were closed and sightless. Then his look crawled towards Frank, as a spider would, hesitatingly, and, being met with blank unconcern, flashed away again, and a peculiar little cast settled itself upon, and gave a nearly diabolical expression to, the red-brown eyes.

He handed a sheet of vellum, on which some address of congratulation or compliment had been elaborately engrossed, to Mr. Headingly, and the latter examined it with apparent satisfaction.

"You have done that very well, and I'm very pleased

with it," the lawyer said, "and I'm especially pleased that you've done it in time. Lord Retford was particularly anxious about that. I suppose Messrs. Roche and Underwood will send me the bill for this. Will they charge by the job or according to time?"

"Ah don't exactly know, sir," the man replied; "but Ah'll ask."

At the sound of the man's voice Dr. Hay, whose face had gone into a sort of reverie during the conversation, drew himself up slowly, and a curious amazement settled itself on his features.

"I will settle Messrs. Roche and Underwood's charges, whatever they may be," Mr. Headingly said; "and here's a half-sovereign for you besides."

"Thank ye, sir," the man replied, and Dr. Hay, sitting bolt-upright, turned his sightless face towards him.

"Mr. Headingly, will you please ask this man his name," he said quietly, and the old clerk's grayish face went nearly green.

"I will, certainly, if you wish it," the lawyer said. "What is your name, sir, if you please?"

"Ah don't see what that's got to do wi' anybody," the clerk replied after a moment's hesitation. "Ah'm sent by Messrs. Roche and Underwood, and ma name isn't ony business to nobody."

With that he was about to shuffle away, when Frank, dashing in front of him, laid his hand on his breast.

"Stay, sir," he said. "I'm beginning to know you, I think, in spite of your white hair and your clean-shaven face."

"Ay, ay!" the lawyer exclaimed. "This seems to be more important than I thought. What may be the matter, Dr. Hay?"

"I think you will have another case on your hands, Mr. Headingly," Dr. Hay replied; "and unless this man can convince me that I am wrong it will be a police-court affair."

"In that case," the lawyer exclaimed sternly, "perhaps you will be good enough to sit down there, Mr. —, I don't know your name, and answer Dr. Hay's questions categorically."

The man looked as if he would much rather have been near the crater of Vesuvius during an eruption, or on board of a leaking ship during a howling hurricane, anywhere but where he stood at that moment. His lips moved silently, and his hands trembled by his sides.

"Ah've nothing to conceal," he said at last, and sat down stubbornly, whilst Frank placed himself behind him, with his hand on the back of his chair, ready to retain him by force if he endeavored to escape.

"Your name, sir?" Dr. Hay asked.

"Andrew Hopkins," the man replied unabashed.

"That is not true," Dr. Hay retorted. "Your name is MacWraith."

The man was evidently by this time prepared for the shock, for he smiled unconcernedly and brazenly, and the little cast in his eye gave him quite a weirdly grotesque appearance.

"Not a bit," he snarled. "Ma name's Hopkins — Andrew Hopkins."

"You say that which is not true," the Rector said, in a perfectly even voice. "Your name is MacWraith, and you are one of the two men — Reinemann and MacWraith — who stole the Bishops' Bible at Thorbury, and left an imitation in its place."

Even that accusation seemed to make no impression upon the man so charged. He shook his head stubbornly.

“Ma gracious!” he exclaimed. “How can ye say so?”

“Will you allow me, Dr. Hay,” Mr. Headingly interfered, “to take up this interrogation myself? It will be better so. Unless Mr. — Hopkins you call yourself — can prove to my satisfaction that he is not Mr. Mac-Wraith who stole the Bible, it will be my duty, I suppose, to call in a constable and give him into custody.”

“Quite so — quite so,” Dr. Hay replied stolidly.

At this quiet intimation, Mr. Hopkins, whose face before that had been a mixture of ashen and sickly green, turned paler than ever.

“Your name is Andrew Hopkins?” Mr. Headingly asked sternly.

“Yes, sir,” the man replied in a scarcely audible voice.

“Your father’s name, sir?”

This in a tone of command.

“Hopkins,” the man answered, as nervously as before.

“Hopkins, of course. His Christian name?”

There was a moment’s hesitation, then came a faint “George.”

“So your father’s name was George Hopkins; and your mother’s?”

This style of peremptory cross-examination took Mr. Hopkins quite aback. He muttered and mumbled for a moment or two, but his answer was so indistinct that none of the listeners could catch it.

“It is useless to continue questioning this man further,” Dr. Hay interrupted. “I am certain of his

identity; I recognized him the moment I heard his voice, and every word he has spoken has confirmed the impression. Look at him, Frank! Surely you know the man? You have seen him."

Young Boyer, who, as we know, had been standing behind Mr. Hopkins's chair, moved sideways so as to allow the light to fall on the shifty face. Suddenly a ludicrous idea flashed through Frank's mind. With a rapid sweep of the arm he grasped Mr. Hopkins's silvery locks. A slight pull, and Frank held aloft a well-made wig, deprived of which Mr. MacWraith stood revealed in all the sandy gloss of his own hair. With a yell of despair he flung himself upon the young man, who towered nearly a head and shoulders above him; but he might as well have attempted to rob Hercules of his club, as to regain possession of his wig where it was held by Frank, who was laughing heartily in spite of himself.

The visible infection caught even Mr. Headingly, who could not help smiling at the pretended Mr. Hopkins's discomfiture. Dr. Hay, hearing the sudden commotion, inquired about its cause.

"The rascal is caught, Doctor!" Frank exclaimed. "I've got his wig in my hand. He's shaved off his beard and whiskers, but I'll swear to him now among a thousand. You had better send for a constable, Mr. Headingly, and we'll give him into custody on a charge of felony."

At these words MacWraith gave a wild shriek. He fell upon his knees, and thus dragged himself to where Dr. Hay sat, and held up his clasped hands in imploration.

"Maircy!" he exclaimed — "maircy! For Heaven's

sake, have maircy! Don't lock me up; don't send me to prison. Ah've suffered enough as it is."

"Suffered!" Dr. Hay replied quietly. "Do you know what I have suffered? Do you know what I am suffering still?"

"It isn't ma fault," the wretched man answered. "It wa'n't ma fault. It's all Reinemann's fault, and he's got awa scot-free, and he's got the siller. Ah haven't had a shellin' of it. Have maircy! Have maircy! Ah'll do anything, but don't send for a constable. Ah'll go mad, Ah know Ah will!"

He clasped Dr. Hay's leg with his outstretched arms, and buried his face against it, sobbing convulsively. Then he started back in a nearly hysterical terror, and gnawed at his thumb-nails, glaring in front of him with ghastly staring eyes. His face betokened such abject fright as few men show except when beneath the threatening shadow of death. His teeth rattled, and his whole frame shook as in a palsy.

Unfortunately for the trapped rascal, the kindly heart upon which this sight would have had an easy and spontaneous effect was guarded from impression by the misfortune which surrounded it with darkness. Dr. Hay heard the frightened man's sobs, but naturally saw nothing of his terrible emotion.

"You have not only injured me," said Dr. Hay with gentle, quiet voice; "that might be easily passed over. The worldly things that I am possessed of, value not to me the sorrow of a human creature. But you have deprived my parish of one of the noblest relics our church possesses. And more than that. You did your nefarious work in such a way that I myself was not held blameless. I do not see at present how, in justice

to myself and to my flock, I can let you go unpunished."

"Don't say that! Don't say that, Dr. Hay!" MacWraith whined. "Let me go! Let me go this once!"

"What has become of the book?" Mr. Headlingly interposed severely.

"I know all about that. I know what, unfortunately for myself, it will cost me to get the book back," the Rector replied in MacWraith's stead. "He has no control over that, and can aid us in no way to get it back. But you can do one thing, sir," he continued, addressing the discovered trickster: "you can write a confession. That may ease your conscience, if you have any. And perhaps, in the meantime, I may consider whether or not I ought to let you go."

A sigh of relief escaped from the man's breast. A gleam of hope lit up his frightened face.

"Anything," he gasped — "anything! Dictate yourself. Anything!"

"Won't this look like compounding a felony?" Frank inquired calmly.

"No," Mr. Headlingly replied. "To obtain a confession of his crime from a man is not compounding a felony. As to letting him go free, that is a matter in reference to which I shall have to speak to Dr. Hay afterwards."

MacWraith's eyes looked the lawyer up and down.

"Sit down there," Mr. Headlingly said roughly. "And if you know such a thing as a prayer, say it in your heart, that Dr. Hay may see his way to treat you mercifully. Take that pen!"

The man obeyed tremblingly; his whole frame quivered, and his pen moved involuntarily as it touched the paper.

“We had better have another witness to this confession,” the solicitor suggested, and struck a gong. “Tell Mr. Robinson to step this way,” he said to the lad who answered, and a few moments afterwards an elderly solicitor’s clerk entered the room. “I want you to witness a document, Mr. Robinson,” Headingly said. “And now, Dr. Hay, will you dictate, or shall the man write of his own accord?”

“Let him write what is in his heart,” the Rector replied, “and I will see whether it will do. I want him to state especially, and plainly too, that this miserable trick was not accomplished with any connivance of mine. You may well look amazed, Mr. Headingly; but there are men in this world, I will not say wicked enough, but foolish and uncharitable enough, to let all of us feel the bitterness of their tongues.”

“Well, sir,” Headingly commanded, “you have heard what Dr. Hay has said. You had better write, and be as clear and concise about it as you can.”

For the next few minutes not a sound was heard in that room but a half-stifled cough now and then, and the scratching of MacWraith’s pen. At last the guilty man looked up and handed the document he had written to Headingly.

“I see you are accustomed to legal forms,” the lawyer said smilingly, glancing over the paper, and then proceeded to read it aloud.

“I, Andrew MacWraith, do hereby state of my own free will that an English Bible on vellum, folio, printed in 1568, was confided by the Reverend Doctor Hay to my partner, Luitpold Reinemann, and myself, for restoration. I regret to say that we appropriated this book to our own uses, and substituted in its place an imitation,

which we enclosed in the old binding, and prepared in such a manner that only an expert could discover the change. The book was sold by my partner to Messrs. Lelande & Co., at Paris, and I am unaware of my former partner's present address."

"I suppose this embodies all you require, Dr. Hay?" Headingly asked.

"It seems to me to be sufficient," the Rector answered.

The document was signed by MacWraith, and witnessed by all present with the exception of the Doctor.

"Well, what is to be done about this man now?" the solicitor asked. "Do you intend to let him go unpunished. That is offering a premium to crime, you know."

MacWraith's face all this while was a map of misery.

"Ye're not goin' to break your word, gentlemen," he whimpered. "Ye're not goin' to —"

"I have promised you nothing that I know of," Dr. Hay said; "but I permitted you to hope. The only sufferer by this crime will be myself. The parish will not lose by it, as I will buy the book back at any price as soon as ever I can. As to myself, Heaven knows I shall want to be forgiven one day myself. I do not want to have it upon my conscience at that terrible moment that I refused mercy to a human creature that pleaded for it. Let the man go, Mr. Headingly."

The change in MacWraith's face was wondrous. He trembled more than before.

"Thank ye, sir!" he cried. "Thank ye, sir!"

"Not so quick, my man," the lawyer interposed. "You shall leave this place, but it must be in my way. I am going to send for a constable to have you arrested. It will take my clerk about three minutes to fetch one." He opened the door as he spoke. "You know your way

out and downstairs. It will be your own fault if the constable finds you here when he arrives."

The puzzled look which had settled on MacWraith's face changed to an expression of intense relief as Mr. Headingly concluded. He looked round scaredly for a moment, and then rushed out as fast as his trembling legs could carry him.

"That is the only way to rid London of the rascal," the lawyer said. "Had I done it in any other way, he would have thought himself free to work in the neighborhood and prey upon others. He is a clever rogue, and can find employment anywhere. You may rely upon it he won't be long before he puts the ocean between himself and you, and if America benefits by his genius, England won't be jealous."

"They hang people for felony in some of the States over there!" Frank exclaimed; "and some such end will befall Mr. MacWraith."

"Never predict evil, my dear Frank," Dr. Hay said quietly. "Let us hope the man may mend his ways and lead a better life. That has weighed with me as much as any other reason in persuading me to let him go."

At the Rector's request Mr. Headingly forwarded by the next post a certified copy of MacWraith's confession to Mr. Isaac Stringer. It reached the churchwarden while he was still in bed. It was a miserably cold, sleety morning, dull and foggy withal, and Mr. Stringer had to order a lamp to be placed by his bedside to enable him to read the document.

"Well, I niver!" he exclaimed, when he had perused it. "An' what does that prove? Why, that he's a fool instead o' bein' a rogue; an' when it's all chalked

down clean an' neat, I don't know which I'd prefer of the two for the shepherd of a Christian flock. Theer isn't a pin's worth to choose between 'em. That's my hopinion, an' I don't care who knows it."

The irreconcilable one was not to be reconciled — at least, not so easily.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE Tuesday of the trial had come. To poor Mary it seemed like a day of doom. It was still pitch-dark when she and Mrs. Noble left the Marlborough Road, after having barely touched their cups of tea. A dense, asphyxiating black fog had settled over the Metropolis, and had banished the light of day. With that it was bitterly cold, and the icy blast of the night had converted the pavement — humid with the moisture of the previous evening — into sheets of ice. A workman was seen now and then hurrying to his employment, rushing out of and vanishing again into the gloom like a spectre; or a servant-girl, with a muffler before her face, daring the dangers of the sidewalk on her morning's shopping. Flaring gaslights in the butchers' and bakers' shops looked like feeble yellow smears, and the roadway itself was silent, untrodden by man or beast. A little further away, in the Fulham Road, the voices of men shouting to one another could be heard vaguely, like calls in a tempest. There was a dull, heavy, indefinable sound in the air, caused by the fog itself.

The kindly tradesman who had introduced Mrs. Noble to Mr. Headingly — a sturdy, portly, ruddy-faced, and ruddy-bearded John Bull, who carried on a thriving butcher's trade — had promised to accompany Mrs. Noble and Mary to the Sessions House. They had been told that if they reached the place by nine they might have a chance of seeing Joseph, and, perhaps, of speaking

a word to him on his way from the prison-vehicle to the cells. Mr. Manley, the kindly butcher, knew the sergeant of police on duty, and might secure, perhaps, in that way, the favor of an extra word.

They had been waiting all the morning for a letter from Isaac Stringer, but no postman had appeared, and they were hoping against hope. They knew that the stern-hearted, proud churchwarden would not show his face near the place where his son was being tried for felony.

Mary had received a letter from the Rector, telling her that he would be in the Sessions House in the course of the day. Neither she nor Mrs. Noble knew — and in their inexperience how could they guess it? — that Dr. Hay had, in the meantime, paid nearly seventy pounds, so that Joseph might be provided with the best obtainable counsel. They had a vague idea that the fifteen pounds which they had given Mr. Headingly would be insufficient, and they tremblingly awaited a request for more money, which they would not have known how to meet. Of course, there was her father; but she would no more have dared to ask him for funds, without at the same time forwarding the solicitor's request, than to address the Queen in similar petition. Even then she knew that her father had ideas of his own about expenditure, and would most likely tell her he had done what he intended to, and would do no more. She blamed herself bitterly for having consented that Mrs. Noble should retain a few pounds. She told herself that she might have done without fire, medicine, or even without food, for a long time; and in her confused reasoning she thought herself able to undergo a number of privations, any one of which would have injured her seriously.

"I did think of bringing round the trap," Mr. Manley said; "but it wouldn't be no more use than a steam-roller or a water-cart this morning. It's that black that you can't see your nose afore your face, and I think the best thing you can do is to wait till the fog clears off."

"Oh, Mr. Manley," Mary pleaded, "I shall miss my brother if we wait. I would rather do anything than miss him. Surely we can walk. We won't ask you to come, but Mrs. Noble and myself, we can find our way."

"Oh, I ain't a-goin' to let you ferret through the fog by yourselves, not if I knows it," the sturdy butcher replied. "Bless your pretty eyes! it ain't come to that yet, my dear. A man ain't a mouse, and I hain't one o' them coves as is afeard to show their nose outside of a muffler on a foggy morning. Come along, my dear. Where you can get along I can find room for my bluchers. A wink and a sneeze and there we hare."

The journey, however, was not by any means an easy one. They had allowed an hour for reaching the Sessions House, but it was long after ten o'clock when they got there, chilled to the bone, and half blinded by the fog, which had become clearer and whiter, but no less dense.

At the entrance to the court-house gray fantastic figures, muffled up to the eyes, their features distorted by the density of the atmosphere, stood and moved about, looking with seemingly dead eyes at the foggy pall. In the passages the tramp to and fro of many heavy feet echoed on the flags. Men, and women too, shot out of the gray haze, loomed for a moment or two like automats, and again disappeared.

Manley fortunately knew the building and its intri-

cacies, and guided Mrs. Noble and Mary to a large bare room where a great fire burned in the chimney-place at one end. Some half-dozen bare wooden benches stood about the place, and every seat on these, as well as in front of the fire, was occupied by men and women, belonging in large proportion to the poorest and most wretched classes of the community. Mary's eyes fell upon one gaunt, lean, tattered woman, whose coal-black eyes, staring from a white face, bespoke hunger in its utmost terrors, and whose rags seemed to fall from her. She was suckling a babe, and with her free arm encircled two equally white-faced and equally ragged infants of some three or four years. To Mary the woman's eyes brought new terrors, and her hand instinctively wandered towards her pocket, where she had placed some silver and coppers to be ready for all emergencies.

"Look at that poor woman in the corner, Grannie," Mary whispered; "look at her. I'm sure she's starving to death." And without another word she walked to where the creature sat and put a small piece of silver in her hand. The woman's face lighted up in a grotesque, half-mad grin, and she uttered a faint little shriek, followed by small peals of hoarse laughter. She picked up her children as if they were bundles of rags, and, with her torn boots clapping on the floor, she shuffled out of the room.

"You'd ha' better kept that money, miss," said a big policeman who had witnessed the scene; "she'll buy gin with that sixpence, and in half an hour she'll be as drunk as she was yesterday."

"Isn't the poor woman starving?" Mary asked with wondering eyes.

"Starving!" sneered the policeman. "She wouldn't

eat bread if you was to give it her. She don't want no food. It's drink she lives on."

"But those children, those poor, wretched, starving children!" said Mary.

"Oh, they'll die, unless she's locked up and they're taken away from her, which is sure to happen sooner or later."

"Then what is she doing here?" Mary asked faintly.

"Doing here?" the policeman exclaimed; "she's always here. If she ain't being tried herself, it's somebody what belongs to her that's bein' tried. It's her husband what's bein' tried to-day, and they do say she's in the job too."

"And what did he do?" Mary asked.

"Sneaked the clothes off a lot of kids and pawned them. Nice couple they are!"

Mary looked further round the place. She thought she never had seen such a scowling, degenerated lot of men and women before. Great hulking fellows with square jowls and hang-dog looks conversed in hoarse whispers with unwomanly women. Mean-looking creatures, with the word "crime" printed on every feature, crept about with their shoulders drawn up high, with fearful eyes searching dreaded corners. There was a small half-hushed Babel of undertoned talk, with now and then a peal of laughter, a ribald oath, or a curse sounding shrill and strident in the midst of it.

And into such a company her brother's misfortune had brought her. Mary shuddered when she thought of Joseph. These people were the onhangers on the outskirts of crime. Where would Joseph be dragged to if he were condemned? She felt herself turn pale, and

such a sinking gnawed at her heart that, for a moment, she thought she was going to faint.

Manley had been looking about the building for a place where he could leave his charges while he made inquiries, and through the intercession of his friend, the sergeant of police, he had received permission to take them to the ushers' room.

There Mary, much relieved by the change, and Mrs. Noble, sat themselves down before the fire while their protector went into the court to see what chance there was of Joseph's case coming on soon. A quarter of an hour elapsed before he returned.

"Mr. Headingly's there," he said, "and Mr. Gregory's there in his wig and gown. The case is the next on the list, and the one they're on now won't last more than half an hour at most."

Mary's heart beat faster at these words. She looked about inquiringly. The Rector had promised to be there, and Frank. She framed the question in her heart if Mr. Manley had seen them, but it died from her memory.

"You wait here, my dear. I'll look in again," Mr. Manley said. "I'll find a place for you the moment the case is called."

Another half-hour, and then, she thought, another. Her sight was growing fainter, and her head swam just a little, when the good-hearted butcher put his head in at the door and called :

"Come on, my dear. They've given that fellow six years' penal servitude. It's our turn now. Come on !"

Mary allowed herself to be taken by the hand, and to be led away. She knew that she was being taken into a room crowded with people, through whom they had

to push their way, but that was all. All round was black to her, and when Mr. Manley had put her into a seat, where she was wedged in so that she could barely stir, she felt her limbs give way beneath her, and she would have slipped down from the narrow seat had she not made a desperate effort to keep conscious. All was confusion; a sea of heads, a mixed hum of voices. Once she thought she heard her brother's name, and that roused her just a trifle. She tried hard to peer through the phantasmagoric gloom that shrouded her vision, and by and by the scene became a little lighter, and a little more distinct to her, and she thought she saw her brother's face beneath some rows of other faces near the right-hand end of the room.

She looked again, and strained her eyes. Yes, that was Joseph; there he was all right enough, but so pale and so changed, and as she turned her head a little on one side she saw his scarlet jacket, a red speck amongst the sombre hues that surrounded it. Behind him a couple of policemen, and some men in a uniform she did not know, kept watch and guard. Her wits brightened a little, but there was still a dull pressure on her forehead, and she had to look hard before she could discover Badger, with his locks as glossy and as oiled as ever, but with such a woe-begone face, by her brother's side.

A little way in front of her there was quite a row of gray, curled wigs, and presently one of these bobbed up and said something she could not comprehend, and sat down again. Then another one followed suit, and other gentlemen made short speeches, of none of which she understood a word. Presently a man, a detective in plain clothes, entered the witness-box, and his voice

was clear and strong, and it sounded in that room like a bell — a bell of judgment, Mary thought. Every word he spoke, every answer he gave, was an accusation of Joseph. He stated how he had suspected and watched both Badger and Joseph for some time; how he had seen both Badger and Joseph repeatedly in the company of one of the men who were actually known to have been concerned in the robbery. How, when he arrested both Badger and Joseph, he found in their possession property which had been stolen from Herndale House on the night of the burglary. Mary's heart sank within her, and she thought that if there was much such evidence Joseph was lost.

A gentleman in a gray wig rose and asked the man some questions, but the detective said nothing that was favorable to Joseph. He was followed in the box by another man, and then some gentleman gave evidence about the jewelry which had been found on her brother and Badger. Mary's sight grew dim again, and she had to clasp Mrs. Noble's hand to prevent herself from fainting. The air of the room, although chilly, stifled her, and even the strings of her bonnet hurt her throat. A dull, humming noise settled itself upon her ear. A gentleman in a wig and gown rose and made a short speech, in a voice which she liked. She thought, half unconsciously, that he spoke of her brother, and, listening more attentively, she *did* hear that he was trying to excuse him. That roused her from the inanition with which she had hitherto unsuccessfully grappled, and she felt stouter at heart, and more hopeful.

Then a gentleman got into the box, a tall, handsome gentleman, and to Mary's eyes he looked like a hero of

romance, great and noble, when he stated that her brother was a good lad, an honest lad, and that he, for one, and he was his captain, felt sure that he was incapable of a dishonest action. Mary's tears started to her eyes, and she could have kissed that man's hands there and then. Then another stepped into the box, and yet another; the last one, a big sergeant, with his breast all covered with medals, said: "He'd be hanged if he believed Joseph capable of such a thing," and there was a titter in the court, which the ushers hushed down immediately; but the judge himself smiled, and was not displeased, so Mary imagined.

But what a rataplan was there in Mary's bosom, when Frank Boyer entered the box, she did not know from whence: he seemed to start up as if by magic. And when he deposed that he had known Joseph from babyhood, had seen him grow up, and had never known him guilty of a mean or dishonest action, she deemed him the loveliest man in the world, and reflected how happy Miss Ophelia must be with such a sweetheart.

Frank had stepped down, and there was a sudden hush in the room, a dead silence. Mary, looking for the cause of it, saw Dr. Hay being led by Frank to the witness-box. Hope again fluttered tumultuously in her heart, when she heard that melodious voice raised in her brother's behalf. There could be no mistake, even in the mind of the meanest, about the impression made by the blind witness's evidence upon all round.

Mr. Manley was sitting in front of Mary, and Mr. Headingly in front of Mr. Manley. She saw the solicitor turn round sharply to her kindly friend. The lawyer spoke in a whisper, yet Mary understood every syllable.

“The case is safe,” Headingly said. “Dr. Hay has settled them. They’ll not give a verdict against our man now.”

The gentleman in the wig and gown who had spoken for Joseph rose again, and Mary wondered how he knew her brother so well, and came to like him so much. If he had been his friend from early childhood, he could not have said more kindly things of Joseph. And how beautifully he spoke! with what eloquence! Mary knew only one man who could approach him in that matter—Dr. Hay. And as he proceeded, the gentleman’s voice became louder, and Mary felt that he looked straight at the jury, and she saw every man in the box looking straight at him. And Mary, scanning their faces, and searching them with eager eyes for traces of kindness, thought that they looked like good men who would not find an innocent lad guilty, and break his sister’s heart, and bring shame on the old father at home.

Then there was silence again, and another man in a wig and gown said something, and yet another, who spoke for Badger; but Mary followed them not. Then the judge made a speech, and Mary thought that he was not as kind as the gentleman in the wig and gown who had spoken for her brother. He said some things that were in Joseph’s favor, and others that were against him, and Mary thought he might just as well have omitted these, and her fears returned. She trembled like an aspen leaf when, in the midst of a small confusion, the jury left their box. Then as she waited, and waited, and waited, with aching heart, in that mixed hubbub of noises and voices which rose and swelled about her, she felt herself growing cold, a choking sen-

sation gripped her at the throat, and, on a sudden, all was blank and black to her.

When she awoke to consciousness, she found herself in the ushers' little room, with Mrs. Noble, Mr. Manley, Mr. Headingly, Dr. Hay, and Frank standing about her, and Joseph kneeling at her feet.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"YOU surpassed yourself, Mr. Gregory," Mr. Headingly said to the famous criminal counsel in the robing-room. "That was the finest appeal to a jury I've ever heard. You saved that lad from penal servitude, and no mistake. That speech will go down to posterity, as it deserves to do."

"Don't you believe it, Headingly," the barrister replied. "The case wasn't of sufficient importance, to start with, and then it was a race between good character and police evidence all along; and good character won, hands down, in a common canter. Egad! what a witness to put before a jury — that blind clergyman! He'd save the greatest rascal that ever was put in a dock. As to that lad, he had honesty and stupidity written all over his face, and that got him free as much as anything else. Can I give you a lift in my cab? I'm going to Westminster."

While the two lawyers were rattling westward, another happy party set out in the same direction. Grannie Noble and Mary, and the good-natured butcher and Joseph, stowed away in a four-wheeler, were making their way towards the Marlborough Road, where Dr. Hay and Frank had promised to meet them. Mr. Manley, with the milk of human kindness brimming over in his big heart, shook hands with Joseph regularly once in every two minutes.

"I'm as pleased as Punch that you're comin' back

with us!" he would say. "I'm that pleased, that I don't know how to be more. I always did stick up for you; didn't I, Miss Stringer? Shake hands on it, old man. And when we get down to the Fulham Road, we'll wash it down in a glass of something; won't we, Mrs. Noble? It was worth comin' through the fog, to hear that lawyer chap speak, and that nice blind clergyman. If he had a church anyways near by me, I'd go twice every Sunday regular, that I would. Look here!" he suddenly burst out; "you come into my shop as we come along, and I'll get the missus to mix you something hot to warm the cockles o' your heart this cold day."

Mary protested she was anxious to reach the Emporium.

"Well, I do suppose," the kindly one replied, "as you've got a word or two to say to your brother arter not seein' him all this while. So I'll just look in by and by, when you're snug and comfortable. And I'll tell you one thing, lad: If ever you want a friend, you call on Dick Manley, and if he don't turn up trumps I'm a Dutchman. Every chap hasn't got a sister like yours, bless her dear little heart! I wish she was my daughter, I do. Now you needn't blush, my dear; it's meant down to the bottom. When Dick Manley says a thing it's as good as his bond, and they do say in the Fulham Road as Dick Manley's bond's as good as the Bank o' Hengland."

As they were approaching Knightsbridge Joseph bethought himself that it was his duty to report himself at the barracks.

"Surely they can spare you for one more afternoon," Mary pleaded. "You've been away so long. I know

that nice gentleman who spoke for you won't be angry if you tell him you've been with your sister. They all do seem to like you, anyhow."

"No, Mary," Joseph answered; "I'd better report myself. As like as not they'll let me off when I've done so. I'd better report myself first."

"He's right," Manley joined in. "Quite right. Discipline afore everything."

Manley was a corporal in the Middlesex Yeomanry Cavalry, and as such considered, with greater men than himself, that obedience was the private soldier's first duty.

Arrived at the barrack-gates, Joseph stopped the cab, and, disengaging his long legs, jumped out. His arrival had evidently been expected and anxiously waited for, for quite a crowd of life-guardsmen, in and out of uniform, blocked up the gateway, and these, when they saw Joseph, raised a ringing cheer. In another moment he was in their midst, and there was such hand-shaking and shouting, and they all seemed so pleased to see him, that Mary came to think that there were no men in the world like soldiers for kindliness of heart and straightforward knowledge of what is right. She clapped her hands in delight when she saw her brother, half carried in triumph, borne by the crowd towards the inner building amid renewed cheering, which other guardsmen at the barrack windows took up and answered; and she could not help asking the cabman to stop a little while to see if Joseph would not come back immediately.

"Oh, they'll keep him a bit!" Manley exclaimed. "Don't you be afeard for him. They'll make him snug, and he'll come and see you after dinner. He's got to

get his furlough first of all, and they won't grudge him that. Why," he suddenly exclaimed, "as I come to think on it, who paid for that there counsel? That Mr. Gregory never takes less than fifty guineas a day, I know — at least, so I've heard plenty o' people say; and Mr. Headingly never forks any money out of his own pocket: he hasn't got much of it to spare. He always wants his down on the nail. Somebody must have been planking down a tidy sum."

"I only gave him fifteen pounds," Mary protested. "I had no more to give him, and he never asked for more." A happy idea struck her suddenly. "I suppose it's father," she said. "I suppose it's dear old father. He's sent the money up without saying a word. That's just like him, that is."

"If Isaac Stringer has sent that money up to that lawyer in that way, though it is to help his own flesh an' blood, and is his duty to do an' no more — he what rolls in it — I'll confess that I've bin mistook in him all my life. But theer ain't a man less likely to hide his light under a bushel than that same Isaac Stringer. Don't you defend him, my dear. He's your father, an' you've a right to stick up for him; but, thank goodness, he ain't mine."

"But, Grannie, I'm sure he sent up the money. Who should pay such a sum for Joseph, if not he?" was Mary's defiant inquiry.

"Well, I'll believe it when the lawyer tells me so, not afore," Mrs. Noble replied. "Don't you bother your head about that, my dear. If your father has done one good action, he'll mek up for it by mekkin' two other people miserable."

The fog had nearly altogether cleared away when

they reached the Marlborough Road, and the winter sun stood, a deep red disc, on a silvery gray sky. It seemed to Mary as if light, and life, and hope, and sunshine had returned to her after the gloom, and fog, and fear of the morning. The sparrows were chattering noisily on the bare, snow-covered branches of the tree in the back yard, awaiting with open beaks and hungry little stomachs their meal of soaked bread, which Mary spread for them every morning on the flags at the further end of the yard, and which, in her grief of heart, she had forgotten that day.

As neither Mrs. Noble nor Mary would consent, as the good butcher had it, "to wash down the morning's business in something 'ot," he insisted, and would not be denied, in furnishing the joint for the dinner.

"Now, drat it all, Mrs. Noble!" he exclaimed, "you ain't goin' to do me out of my own private little bit o' henjoyment. If you won't drink Joseph's health, you shall eat it, an' it's no use your sayin' no, cos I won't take no, that's flat."

As the result of this friendly controversy, a tempting piece of sirloin was twisting and turning on the bit of string before Grannie Noble's back-parlor fire, carefully attended to by Mary, when Joseph burst in upon the little household in a state of high glee. His comrades had all been more than kind to him, and his captain had given him a week's leave of absence — "to shake off the prison smell," he had said.

"They didn't mean unkindly," Joseph said. "They had made up a small purse to help me to get a lawyer, and they found out that somebody had paid for everything. I must ask Mr. Headingly who it is, that I may thank him from the bottom of my heart."

"Why, Joseph, who can it be but father?" Mary exclaimed. "He sent twenty pounds to me here. I'm sure it's father; who else can it be?"

"Well, I'd like to think it's father," Joseph replied, scratching his head. "I really should like to think it was father. I ain't got no grudge against th' ode man, though he did make it hard to me to think of him as a son ought to."

"Children should never speak against their parents," said a clear voice, and as they looked up, Dr. Hay stood there in the doorway, and Frank. The Rector felt his way with outstretched hands to where Joseph was sitting. "I'm glad," he said, "that you have been able to prove your innocence, Joseph Stringer — glad for all our sakes as well as yours. And I am especially glad that you have been able to do it for your father's sake. He's been very ill lately, and he cannot get about yet, else, I am sure, he would have been near you to-day. Squire Boyer and I have had a long talk about him. The Squire says, and I believe it, that he is pining to get you both back again, only he's too proud and too obstinate to confess it. I am quite sure that, if you were to enter his door at this minute, there would be no happier man in Thorbury than your father."

Mary had crept up to the Rector's side.

"Do you really think that he misses us?" she asked. "Do you really think that I ought to go back?"

"Of course you ought, my dear," the Rector replied. "We'll all go down together, you, and Mrs. Noble, and Joseph, and Frank, and I. We'll make your father feel kindly towards you and all the world, that I promise you."

"Yes," Grannie Noble interrupted, "and he'll bully

her poor life out afore she's a day in the house, and he'll drive poor Joseph among strangers agin, even if he can be bought off. He's one o' them as you can't change, if you was to scrub him forever."

"Now, my dear Mrs. Noble, I won't have you say anything of the kind," the Rector remonstrated. "Mr. Stringer is not one of my particular friends; but I have made up my mind to do my duty in this matter, as he himself would say, and, therefore, to-morrow morning, if you please, we will go down to Thorbury by the first train. It leaves Euston at nine-thirty. You are not doing a roaring trade, I surmise, and can leave the Emporium to take care of itself for a week. We can manage to put you up somewhere in the Rectory."

Grannie Noble protested for a long while. Mary had thoroughly twined herself round the old woman's heart, and the dear creature was aghast at the thought of losing her, and having to live without her. Dr. Hay, however, was firm. His persuasions carried the day.

"Don't you think we ought to telegraph to father?" Mary inquired timidly. "He will be anxious."

"That has been done hours ago," the Rector replied. "Frank telegraphed in my name to Mrs. Hay from the Sessions House, and I have asked her to send the telegram to your father."

Then came the question of the expenses of the journey, and Mary's heart beat fast as she thought that her whole fortune consisted of about ten shillings; but Joseph produced quite a little handful of silver, his back pay, which had been given to him with his leave of absence, and she felt a little easier in her mind.

It was a long time since the Emporium had seen such

bright and happy faces as on that afternoon. Manley came in, and with his cheery John-Bull humor kept even Grannie Noble in a roar.

“I’m sorry, my boy,” the old woman said to Joseph, “that you’ve had to go through all this ; but I’m glad because it’s brought one thing about. They’ve given that scrubby little thief, Badger, two years’ hard labor, and they’ll cut that smeary hair of his clean off. Won’t he look a sight ! It’ll be a long time afore he’ll mek a respectable girl think as highly of him as our Mary did.”

Mary shuddered silently.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHEN the Monday before the trial came, Stringer had so far improved that he was able to wrap himself up in his coat and mufflers, and crawl out into the street. It was a fine and bright winter day, with the sunlight dancing on the snowy ground, and a brisk air was abroad. Stringer, walking at a snail's pace, was still compelled to stop at every few steps. His usually florid face had gone pale, his hands had grown white and flabby, and he paused for a moment to protect them by the bear-skin gloves which he carried in his pocket.

There was one thought which pervaded his mind: his son was going to be tried the next day for felony. Joseph had not been a dutiful lad; but he knew him to be incapable of dishonesty, and so did every man and woman in the village of Thorbury.

He was too ill to go up to London and to speak for Joseph himself; besides that, a Father's evidence would have very little weight, even if it were accepted at all; but there were plenty of people in the village who, he felt sure, would not mind undertaking the journey to London to speak for Joseph, for his — Stringer's — sake. Somehow the idea of the importance of a good character had settled itself firmly in his mind, and with the obstinacy which was so important a factor in his character, he clung to it immediately. He would find somebody to go up to London to speak for Joseph.

Stringer's most influential and stanchest partisan was

Samuel Wilson, a Midland bull-dog, like the doughty churchwarden, who owned some flour-mills of considerable importance near Stringer's end of the village. Wilson was a widower with an only child, a daughter, and the two men had often hinted to one another, over their glasses of toddy, that a union between Joseph Stringer and Susannah Wilson would not be displeasing to either. The two young people had never exercised any particular attraction upon one another, but the two fathers thought that in time that would arrange itself.

When Joseph left his father's house and went to London to enlist, Samuel Wilson rated Stringer soundly for having, as he told him to his face, driven his son away by unkind treatment; and he was so energetic in Joseph's defence that quite a coolness, which, however, soon blew over, sprang up between Stringer and him.

Towards Samuel Wilson's office Isaac Stringer crept that morning. He was weak, he was ill, and he was sick at heart. Samuel Wilson, he felt certain, would go up to London, if he asked him.

The miller's office was situated at the back of a big flagged court, which was approached through a wide archway, and Stringer had to pick his way among carts, and wagons, and sacks, and barrels, to reach it. Samuel Wilson was standing by the open door, and greeted him cheerily, placing a big wooden armchair near the fire for him.

"Some time since I seen thee, Isaac Stringer," the miller exclaimed, "and I'm rare an' glad to find thee about again. Rest thee a bit—theer," he added, seeing his friend quite out of breath.

Stringer was comforted in finding a seat placed ready for him. His strength had been nigh on failing. The

fresh air had done him good and had fatigued him at the same time.

"I'm all right, Samuel," he said. "I'll be all right in a minnit. I've got summat to say to you. I want you to do something for me — a service."

At this intimation Wilson's face sank just a little. He had received many favors at the churchwarden's hands, but the man's character was intensely selfish, and he dreaded the thought of having, in his turn, to do something which might be the cause of expenditure. He was quite ready to support Isaac Stringer by his loudly expressed opinion, or by his personal influence; but to put his hands into his pockets, or to make him a present of his time, was quite another matter, and would have proved exceedingly distasteful and objectionable.

"A service, Isaac?" he half stammered.

He reconciled himself with the reflection that Stringer was a rich man, and could not possibly have come for a loan. As that thought revolved rapidly in his mind he became reassured.

"A service!" he exclaimed cheerfully. "Certainly. Anything you like, Isaac. What can I do for you?"

"My boy will be tried in London to-morrow," Stringer said slowly and quietly, "for that which he never did. They say he's a thief, and I know, and you know, Samuel, that he isn't. Now, I want you to go up to London, and to go to the Sessions House to-morrow, and to say what you know about Joseph, and what you've known about him ever since he was as high as my knee."

Mr. Samuel Wilson was taken thoroughly aback by that request. He liked Joseph well enough, and he knew that he would only be speaking the truth if he

gave him the best possible character. The lad's liberty and honest name were in danger, and with them the reputation of his father, his old friend.

"I — I — I don't," he muttered.

Stringer interrupted him.

"I know what thee art thinkin' about, Samuel," he said stolidly. "I'll provide for that. I'll pay thee thy fare to London and back — second-class if you like. I don't mind goin' to that expense to get a real friend to speak a word for Joseph."

Samuel Wilson was a quick-witted man. He had a habit of easy calculation, and he rapidly jotted down on the mental slate that he would have to expend at least ten shillings beside his fare if he went up to London. He did not dare to ask Stringer for that half-sovereign. Beside that, there was a loss of a whole day to his business, and nobody could know what might occur in one day. He had a habit of deciding quickly, and he made up his mind not to go. But the excuse! What excuse could he offer? Another moment's reflection, and one presented itself.

"When did you say, Isaac, that you want me to go to London?" he asked.

"I want you to be theer to-morrow morning," Stringer replied.

"Dear, dear, that is unfortunate!" the miller exclaimed.

Stringer raised himself in his chair.

"Hunfortunit, Samuel? Why?"

"It is unfortunate," the other rejoined; "most unfortunate. I should ha' been glad to go, hanxious to go; not only for thy sek, but for Joseph's, for I like the lad."

"Why can't you go?" Stringer asked with open eyes.

"Because I've got to be in Brum to-morrow about that mortgage dispute o' Waghorn's. It means two thousand pound to me. Lawyer Selby made the appointment a week ago, and it's too late to put it off now."

"You can write an' put it off," Stringer suggested. "I never hasked you to do a thing for me yet, an' I come nigh on thinkin' I was wrong to ask you now."

"Don't think that, Isaac," the miller pleaded. "I do hope you won't think that. Theer ain't a man in this parish I'd rather do a service for than thee."

Stringer was weak and irritable; his nerves were highly strung, and he felt that he was losing his equanimity of temper.

"You can put it off if you like, Samuel," he said, "and you can go to London, an' if you don't put it off, an' if you don't go to London, it's because you don't like."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" the miller exclaimed; "that's always the way with you. If a man don't do exactly what you want he's bound to do it o' purpose. I do give you my word."

"Don't do that," Stringer cried in a weak rage. "It ain't worth while. I'd be a man or I'd be a mouse. You can tek it as I ain't said nothing to thee, Samuel Wilson, an' as I ain't hasked thee nothin'!"

With that he pulled his mufflers over his ears and crawled out of the office with a face as white as death. The miller attempted to detain him and to mutter a word of excuse, but the churchwarden waved him off in a silent rage.

He was in trouble. For the first time in his life he had asked the assistance of a friend, and had been

refused. He staggered as he crept along with one hand against the fronts of the houses. It was a shame to irritate him so when he was so weak. He reached his own door, and, entering the parlor, sat himself down with his hat on his head and his gloves on his hands.

Surely he had some friend among the men of position in the village who would go up to London and give Joseph a character. He turned their names over in his mind. There was Daniel Sowerby, a retired gentleman farmer, and Nicholas Davey, who had a big interest in some coal-mines in Staffordshire.

Davey had ranged himself on Stringer's side from the very moment the churchwarden had taken up his position against the Rector, and had often declared that the parish was deeply indebted to Isaac Stringer.

Davey lived in a small, quaint old house, which stood in its own grounds, a short distance from the Fox and Dogs, and Stringer, after having rested himself for a short while, went out again into the street with a heavy heart. His progress to Nicholas Davey's house was slow and painful. He thought he would never get there. Mrs. Davey met him at her door, and received him with kindness and attention. But Davey was away somewhere in the north, and had been away for more than a week. Stringer left without stating the object of his visit, and crawled on to Sowerby's place, a little further down the road.

There he found himself face to face with a similar mischance. Sowerby was in Castle Barfield, and would not return till very late at night, perhaps not at all.

These repeated disappointments wore the man out, and he had barely strength enough left to turn, to creep back to his house.

As he reached the corner where the road to the railway turned off, a dog-cart, driven by the Squire, dashed by him, carrying, besides Marmaduke Boyer, the Rector and Frank. Stringer watched them driving down the long straight road, and when they were lost to sight he turned to proceed on his weary way homewards. As he looked round he saw that no less a person than Habakkuk Wood was standing by his side—like himself, looking after the disappearing vehicle. At any other time he would have snapped Habakkuk's head off, but now he was so weak and so ill, he thought a snake might have crawled about him with impunity.

The reader is aware of Habakkuk's disposition towards Stringer; but the sexton was not an unkindly man, and the sight of the churchwarden, pale and shivering, a mere shadow of his former self, made a strong impression upon him.

"I'm glad to see you better, Isaac Stringer," he said quietly. "Thee art no friend o' mine; but I wish no ill to no man, an' you've had enough to last you for a while."

Stringer looked him up and down with heartsore amazement.

"Thee dost not wish me ill, Habakkuk!" he said. "Well, I believe thee, and wish thee none. You've said many wicked things, but you've never stooped to a lie, or to curry favor, and perhaps, after all, a fair enemy's better than a false friend."

"I don't want to be no enemy o' thine," Habakkuk answered. "If thee couldst only get reason into that big head o' thine, an' less spitefulness onto thy tongue."

"Hear, hear!" Stringer exclaimed in a bored voice. "Theer's a pair on us. Let's shake hands."

This remark made Mister Habakkuk smile.

"Thee'll never change, Isaac Stringer," he said. "Ill or well, you're just the same. You'd quarrel with your brother, an' your father an' your mother, as you did with your son an' your daughter. You never know when a man's a friend o' thine an' when he isn't, an' a fine lot o' friends you've got, I dare be sworn. Is there one of 'em as has lifted a finger for your Joseph now he's in trouble?"

The shaft went straight home, and the poor man staggered under it. He clutched at his muffler as if he were choking.

"Is there one of 'em as would do what the Rector's a-doin' now?" Habakkuk continued unheedingly. "Is there one of 'em as would go up to London in this winter weather, a-spendin' of his money an' his time, to speak up for your Joseph, as he's a-doin' now?"

Stringer's sight suddenly became treacherous. Everything round was gray to him, and little red spots and specks danced about in a cold, bluish halo before his eyes. A lump rose to his throat and half choked him, and he had to shake himself and to clutch Habakkuk's arm to prevent himself from falling. With an effort he forced open his drooping eyelids and discovered that he was looking at everything as through a rain-bespattered glass. He attempted to speak, and found that for a moment or two he could not.

"The Rector?" he asked, when he recovered his power of speech at last. "The Rector, you said? He's goin' up to London to speak up for Joseph?"

"That he is," Habakkuk replied. "Not as you deserved it: oh, dear, no! But he ain't one o' them as wants the childern to suffer for the sins o' their fathers.

He's gone up, an' he'll be theer to-morrow, you may tek your hoath."

"The Rector's gone up to London o' purpose to speak for my Joseph?" Stringer insisted hoarsely. "You're sure o' that, Habakkuk? Quite sure? But he's blind; how can he do it?"

"Mr. Frank's goin' up with him to tek him about," the sexton replied. "You go an' turn that over in your mind, Isaac Stringer, an' think o' what you've bin doin' to that man, an' what you've bin a-sayin' agin him" —

Stringer leaned panting against the wall for support. There was such a pitiful expression in his face, akin to that of a man who is pleading for mercy. Habakkuk, after looking at him for a moment doubtfully, continued:

"Yes, think what you've bin sayin' agin him, an' what he's suffered through thee a-sayin' it. An' then get it into that thick head o' thine that, at this instant minnit, he an' Mister Frank's the only two men that's stirrin' a hand or a foot to help thy boy, an' that's a-helpin' thee, I reckon. An' more than that. I know that the Rector's as poor as poor can be for a reverend gentleman like he, an' I do know it as he's sent nigh on seventy pound out of his own pocket up to London to get big lawyers to defend thy Joseph, an' he niver said nothin' about it to thee, nor no man, nor would, if it weren't known through other folk."

Habakkuk saw that Stringer had grasped a low window-sill with both hands, and was holding on to it to prevent himself from falling.

"Thee'rt ill," the sexton said. "Come, let me tek thee home."

Stringer looked at him with unconsciously staring eyes, and allowed himself to be led away like a child.

"Nigh on seventy pound. Nigh on seventy pound. Nigh on seventy pound," he babbled as he walked along. "He paid it an' niver said nothin.' Nigh on seventy pound. Nigh on seventy pound. Nigh on seventy pound. And he's gone up to speak for Joseph. He's gone up to speak for Joseph."

Then he became suddenly silent, and walked with one hand in Habakkuk's, as schoolboys might. The sexton noticed that a shiver crept over Stringer, and that he wriggled underneath his coat and his mufflers as in a cold chill. The two crawled along, and the rare passers-by wondered to see Isaac Stringer and Habakkuk Wood walking along the village street hand in hand. Boys stared at them with droll amazement, and raced off to spread abroad the wondrous news that the churchwarden and sexton were friends again.

At the door of his house Stringer stopped.

"Habakkuk Wood," he said, "I've bin sayin' a lot o' things agin thee, an' I've been doin' a lot o' things agin thee, as I'm sorry for. I can't say no more; I ain't well enough. But if I was to talk for a week I couldn't feel it bigger here."

"I don't want to be no man's henemy, Isaac Stringer," Habakkuk replied, "an' I don't want to be thine. I'm gettin' oldish on my pins, an' it won't be many year afore they'll want another sexton in this parish, an' if I can, I'd be glad to live in peace with my neighbors. Here's my hand on it, Isaac Stringer. Thee hast said thee art sorry, an' no man can say more."

All through that afternoon, and all through that evening, one phrase kept dinning through Stringer's head: "He's gone up to speak for my boy! He's gone up to speak for my boy! He's gone up to speak for my boy!"

Psychology has left undefined the subtle methods of reasoning by which a man who hates another can, on a sudden, be brought to like him. The senses remain the same. The effect of sight and hearing is the same, and yet it has been known that a woman has fallen in love with a man whom, but a short time previously, she considered downright ugly. Less than twelve hours ago the Rector could not do any act which was not immediately explained to his disadvantage by Stringer, and now the churchwarden sat in his room, wondering and pondering how he could have so long and so terribly misunderstood so good a man. His heart ached that he was not able there and then to go to him and ask his forgiveness.

As the afternoon advanced, and he felt better again, he strolled out once more, and walked towards the Rectory in the hope of meeting either Mrs. Hay or Ophelia. He came across neither of the ladies, however, and he was tired a long distance from the church, and had to turn back. When he got home again he spoke so kindly to Susan that the old woman could not make him out at all, and he went to bed with a lighter heart, in spite of his trouble, than he had done for many a day. He slept soundly, and well he might, for he had thrown off as heavy a load as ever weighed upon a man — his hatred and his uncharitableness.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE Tuesday morning which was so foggy and miserable in London dawned at Thorbury bright, brisk, and cheerful. As Stringer looked out of his window, he espied in the field beyond his garden quite a colony of rooks fluttering and pecking, and he followed their movements listlessly, with an amused self-possession. He remembered that there had been a trouble on his mind when he went to bed, and that that trouble related to Joseph, but in his half-drowsy, half-waking state he rubbed his eyes, and could not for the life of him remember exactly what it was. Bit by bit, as he yawned and stretched himself, his thoughts travelled back to actualities, and he remembered that this was the day on which Joseph was to be tried. Strange, it did not seem to trouble him — at least, not much.

“The Rector will be theer,” he said to himself; “so will Mister Frank. They’ll get Joseph off all right.”

He repeated that sentence to himself until it became a sort of cabalistic formula to him, to dispel his fears whenever they approached.

He arose cheerfully, and new life and vigor seemed to have been instilled into his frame. He walked more easily and much more firmly; the semi-senile nervous tremor had left him, and he quite enjoyed his frugal breakfast of tea and plain toast. Then he sat himself down by the window and looked out into the street, counting the minutes, wondering how early in the day

his son's case would come on, and whether or not he would learn the result that same day. Yet he had no fear about the upshot of it.

"The Rector's theer," he muttered to himself whenever a doubt forced its poignant shaft upon him. "The Rector's theer, an' he's paid great lawyers to speak up for Joseph. I've got to pay him back, an' that I will gladly. It's very good of him, that it is; but no man shall say that Isaac Stringer is in his debt for as much as a silver sixpence."

The morning passed at a snail's pace, and its slow, dragging reflection brought its sharpened goads upon Stringer's conscience. The scene at the fire of the church passed before his mind. He remembered the Rector as he walked, with head erect and a face of dignity, into that roaring furnace. He was bound to confess to himself that his accusation of that moment had been wicked and unwarrantable; but, although subsequent events had proved it to be so, he had not until this morning been able to see his conduct in that fearful light.

He had wronged the Rector, and the Rector had returned good for evil. He had hated the Rector with the obstinate hatred which an unreasoning disposition and an unbendable tenacity could engender, and now, having suddenly and surprisedly discovered that he was wrong, he liked the man as unreasoningly and as unreasonably as, before that, he had hated him, and was like to be just as unbendable and as obstinate in his friendship as he had been in his hatred. But there was that about the man which commanded respect. He had no sooner discovered his error than he acknowledged it to himself, and was ready and eager to acknowledge it

to all the world. As Grannie Noble had said, his good qualities were so deep down in his nature that one had to take a pickaxe to dig them out; but, once brought to the surface, they asserted themselves, like every other trait of the man's character, stubbornly and demonstratively.

His midday meal, consisting of a grilled chop and a boiled potato, was brought to him, and he quite enjoyed the small portion of it which he ate. As the afternoon wore on, he became just a trifle fidgety, but his faith in the Rector's ability to get his son set free never diminished. He relied upon him with a nearly childlike confidence which he could not possibly have explained or justified.

"They're sure to telegraph when the case is over," he said to himself. "They won't leave me in this state without lettin' me know."

Thus he waited in tranquil assurance that ere long the news would come to him that Joseph was free.

From where Stringer sat he had a view of the village street nearly three hundred yards ahead in the direction of the Rectory. He scanned the perspective in front of him in the eager hope of seeing the messenger of good tidings speeding towards his house. He felt sure the news would be good. How could it be otherwise, with the Rector in London to look after Joseph?

He sat there counting the hours on his watch, but never getting impatient. Three o'clock was past when he saw one of the Rector's servants running at top speed in the direction of his (Stringer's) house. The man carried a paper of some sort in his hand, and Stringer noticed that, as he passed the little haberdasher's shop some distance down the road, he waved it as if in

triumph to the man standing at the door, and the shop-keeper clapped his hands in seeming delight.

"It's the message that Joseph is free," Stringer said to himself in glad assurance. "It's the message that Joseph is free, I know!"

He walked to his door and opened it, and stood waiting for the man as he raced up, waving the telegram.

"Joseph's got off," the man cried, even before he reached Stringer's door; "and Mrs. Hay sends you this to let you know it's so!"

Stringer took the telegram from the man's hand, and read it tremblingly.

"Tell Mrs. Hay," he said, when he looked up again, "that Isaac Stringer is greatly beholden to her, and to the Rector — greatly beholden, and grateful" —

He turned and entered the house, and shut the door, so that the servant might not be a witness of his emotion.

He kept that telegram in his hand, staring into the parlor fire all the while. Such a load off his mind: his good name safe and untarnished, and he able to hold his head as high as ever. And as he used to reason, in his unreasonableness, that the Rector was the cause of each and every ill that befell him, so he argued now, in his changed mind, that he owed this deliverance from the sting of shame — this averted finger of scorn — to Dr. Hay. He was the fountain whence all this new-born blessedness sprang, and no man ever blushed more, as he traced back the events of his immediate past, than Isaac Stringer that afternoon.

He would be friends again with the Squire, and he would be friends with the Rector. He would live at

peace with the world, and while Christian principles were being promulgated in God's church, he would not interfere even if hymns, of praise were sung by a choir dressed in Papish bedgowns.

Another desire — a craving — leaped to his heart, and grappled with his soul. He wanted Mary to come back to him, to make home homelike again, and to bring back his sunshine with the light of her smiles.

He looked round the room, and even in the midst of the excitement of the moment he felt that her fairy presence was needed to make him content. He could live without Joseph, though, after what had happened, he would prefer that Joseph should live at home again. But Mary was as necessary to him as the light of day, as his food and as his drink, and he vowed that, if his child would not return of her own accord, he, who had never begged for aught, would go to her and implore her to live with him again.

During the night that followed, he dreamed a glad dream. Christmas had come again, with its holly and its mistletoe, and he was sitting at his own Christmas board, and his children were about him — Joseph and Mary both. The son — whom he had learned to love, because he was as proud, as manly, and as unyielding as himself; a true chip of the old block; honest, straightforward, and stubborn; like faults, like virtues, father and son — and his daughter in her blooming maidenhood, tender, simple, loving, and true, as a good English girl ought to be. And he was so happy with them, and they were so happy with him, and he thanked his God that on that Christmas Day he was at enmity with no man, and that no man was at enmity with him.

When the village doctor called the next morning, he

found Stringer so much better that he wondered at the sudden improvement.

"We'll soon have you as jolly and as busy as ever," he said. "You will be able to blow up people as roundly as ever you did."

"Niver you mind that, doctor," Stringer replied. "You tell me whether I'm strong enough to go to London."

"Well, we're not going so fast as that," the rural medico answered. "We must learn to walk before we can leap."

"And how long will it be afore I can leap as fur as London?" Stringer insisted.

"Maybe a week. Maybe a little more," was the physician's reply.

A week to wait — a week, at least, before he could go to London and ask Mary to come back again. He might write, it was true; but he did not feel so sure of the effect of a letter as of his personal request. Grannie Noble might dissuade her. Grannie Noble did not like him, and, as he came to think of it, he had given her reason not to be fond of him.

It was a bother that he would have to wait a week, but he preferred to wait, rather than risk a letter. A week was not such a very long time, after all, and he would be patient. He walked up and down his room in the pleasant excitement of the prospect of seeing his Mary again before eight or ten days were over his head. He would get well, and quickly; those doctors were always too cautious. He felt sure he would be well enough in three or four days to go up to London. He squared his shoulders and pushed out his chest in defiant assertion of his rapid recovery. In three or four days? Why, in two days, most likely, he would be well enough.

Susan, coming into the room to look after the fire, was amazed to see her master smiling his proudest, and parading up and down the room like a soldier on the drill-ground, firmly and measuredly. The old woman had seen him in so many different moods, that this new phase of temperament puzzled her a trifle, but did not weigh heavily with her. It was better for her peace of mind that her master should be in a pleasant temper, foolish though it might be to her eyes, than that his former irascibility should bring back a fit of bullying.

The afternoon was well advanced, and Stringer was still engaged in his march up and down the parlor, when a most unusual noise burst upon his ear from the street. It sounded as if a riot had broken loose in the usually so quiet village. Men were shouting, and cheering, and yelling, and never, except at election times, had Stringer heard such a prodigious hubbub in Thorbury. He went to his door again, opened it, and stood on the steps.

Away down the street, just where the road to the railway turned off, there was a big crowd. There was a wagonette in the centre of it, and on it, Stringer thought, were Frank Boyer and the Rector. Some ladies were sitting behind them, but he could not see who they were. The wagonette was coming towards him at a walking pace, and the crowd was moving with it — men and women, boys and girls; and they shouted enough to make the bells of Thorbury Church ring again. For the life of him, Stringer could not guess what it all meant. The Rector had returned, that he could see; but why this unusual popular demonstration?

As they got a little nearer he espied in the crowd a bright red spot, which burst upon him as some man

moved casually from one side to the other; and, as he strained his eyes, he saw a soldier's uniform. It was Joseph, his Joseph, they were escorting as in triumph to his father's home — Joseph returned to him. A feverish sensation crept over him, a touch of hope so fierce that he turned sick and faint at the thought of a possible disappointment. If Joseph came back, where was Mary? Surely she would not stay behind if his son returned.

The procession came nearer, moving as noisily as before, but he dared not look. If Mary was not there, he would not know what to do, and yet he hardly dared believe that she was so near. His head swam, and he groped his way back to the parlor, and sat himself down there. The shouting and cheering drew nearer and nearer, and he could hear the tramping of many feet, and the shrill cries of the children as they swarmed ahead of the crowd, right up to his doorstep, calling, "Mr. Stringer! Mr. Stringer!"

Yet he dared not look. He sat with his hands to his heart, as though dreading that it would stop. His breath was failing him, and he fancied that if many more minutes passed without his hope being realized he would not live beyond them.

He could hear the footfalls of the noisy crowd on the round stones of the sidewalk. He could hear the grating of the wheels as the wagonette stopped at his own door. He could hear the men shout, cheering the Rector, cheering Frank, cheering Joseph, and his own name was not forgotten. He heard the little swish of his front door as it was opened, and the steps of men and women who entered his house. Then the lock of his parlor-door clicked, and a multitude, as he thought,

came into the room; but yet he dared not look till a soft, sweet voice, which he knew so well, whispered right close to him, "Father," and he raised his eyes, and opened his arms, and clasped his Mary to his breast.

A moment afterwards he was laughing and crying at the same time, and he was shaking hands with everybody, and everybody shaking hands with him, and if he had been a child again he could not have been more happy. There was his Mary. He had pulled her down by his side, and she sat on the arm of his chair quite close to him, and the world had not had such pleasure for him this many a day. And there was his son, the son whom he had allowed to depart without a friendly word, and whom he was right pleased to see again at home. Even Grannie Noble looked kindly and motherly to him, and he held out his hand to her and thanked her for having taken care of his child. And then, as he looked beyond those immediately in front of him, he saw the Rector and Frank—the Rector with his white, white hair and his closed eyes.

He rose slowly, tremblingly. He pushed even his child aside. He walked to where the Rector stood and looked straight into that blind face. Stood and looked, stood and looked, without being able to utter a word.

The Rector, who seemed instinctively to feel that somebody was near him, put out a searching hand. With a feverish grip Stringer clutched it and carried it to his lips. He dropped it with a sharp cry, while Dr. Hay, smiling perplexedly, searched vacancy again with his hand.

"I did you grievous wrong, Dr. Hay," Stringer said

at last, "and you've repaid evil with good. I'm ashamed o' myself. I say it afore all these people, that all the village may know it. Isaac Stringer is ashamed and sorry for havin' spoken an' done agin you as he did. Ashamed and sorry from the bottom of his heart."

He held out his hand, forgetting for the moment that the Rector could not see it; but Dr. Hay approached, and, placing one hand on Stringer's shoulder, grasped the churchwarden's hand with the other.

"Don't say any more about it, Stringer," he said. "I am only too happy to have been able to be of service to you; and now you've got your children back, keep them. They're worth keeping, I promise you."

The rest of what he said was drowned amid the cheering that rang through the room and in the street outside. Stringer and the Rector were friends, and they were all one happy family again, without dissensions to divide them, without bickerings in their church, without soreness of heart amid their devotions.

Stringer had begged the Rector's pardon publicly before all men. The news spread with lightning rapidity, and men came running up from all parts of the village to be witnesses of that un hoped-for reconciliation.

As Mrs. Hay read out the figures in her husband's pass-book that evening as they were sitting in committee of ways and means, she totted up the sums which Dr. Hay had expended in Joseph's behalf, and found that they amounted to eighty-five pounds.

"It's a lot of money, dear Denis," she said. "The man pretends to be grateful to you, and no doubt he is; but he ought to pay that money, and not you."

"It's the best-spent eighty-five pounds, my dear, that I

have ever paid away in my life. Think of it! The peace of my parish bought for eighty-five pounds — brotherly and Christianly feeling restored in Thorbury for eighty-five pounds! No, my dear, we will not allow Stringer to repay us that money. That shall be his one punishment. He shall remain in my debt forever.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

STRINGER'S reconciliation with the Rector, and the return of his children, were the nine days' wonder of the village of Thorbury. With the recantation of their chief, the Stringer faction dissolved and vanished like snow before the summer sunshine.

On the Sunday following the coming home of his son and daughter, Stringer appeared for the first time in the rebuilt church, and young and old wondered at the change in the man's manner. He had been snappish before, and now he was kindly. He had been surly, and now he was pleasant. His children used to move in fear and trembling of him, and now they seemed contented in their father's presence. He regained his strength in a surprisingly short space of time, and he was never so happy as when his daughter was about him. Even Grannie Noble had to confess that she had been wrong in her estimate of his character.

"Speak o' washin' a nigger white," the old woman exclaimed, "it ain't a hand's turn compared with makin' your father that pleasant-spoke, my dear. I can remember the day when they'd ha' bin lookin' for the witch as did it. Theer now, my dear, and though it is to you as is his child as I say it, theer wasn't a grumpier man, nor a more spiteful one in Thorbury than your father, an' what's come over him that sudden you may brek my head an' I couldn't tell you."

Mary was quite as much surprised as the rest of the

good people of the village at the change in her father's demeanor, but she was too happy to say aught about it.

As Joseph's week of furlough drew near its end, Stringer decided to go up to London with him for the purpose of buying him off. To this project he joined another, more difficult to perform; and how to proceed about it he did not know. He had heard that the original Bishops' Bible, which MacWraith and Reinemann had stolen, was for sale somewhere abroad, and that a large sum of money was being asked for it. Leipzig had been mentioned to him as the actual town; but for all the geographical significance that fact had to Stringer, they might just as well have named Yokohama, Lisbon, or Constantinople. He knew that it was abroad, that it was far away, and that the sea lay between it and England. He had an uncertain fancy that the people who lived there did not speak English, though why anybody, anywhere, should not speak English, he was at a loss to comprehend. English was good enough for him, and had been good enough for his father and his grandfather before him, so it ought to be good enough for all the world. He had come across a few foreigners. Most of them spoke English funnily, some of them badly; but all of them spoke English, even if it was after a fashion of their own. Therefore, when Habakkuk told him that if he went to Leipzig he would not be able to ask for as much as a glass of water or a glass of beer, or a bit of bread and cheese, and make himself understood, he held up his hands in holy horror that such a place existed in the wide, wide world; and he was not a bit astonished that that was the town in which they offered for public sale valuable property stolen in England. It must be an ungodly Papish town.

"Then, if I went theer," Stringer asked Habakkuk, "I couldn't give 'em the length o' my tongue?"

"Not without thee didst tek somebody wi' thee to speak foreign for thee," the sexton replied. "I ain't no hand at them outlandish languages myself; but theer's the horganist, and the Rector, and Mr. Frank — they all do speak no end of 'em."

"An' if I told them what to say, they'd give them furriners a bit o' my mind in such a way as they'd understand?" Stringer asked.

"Well, as I tek it," Habakkuk answered, "them what sells the Bible ain't the men what stole it."

"Stole it? Sellin' stolen property ain't much better 'an stealin' it," the churchwarden insisted. "I must get somebody to go along wi' me. I wish you could ha' done it, Habakkuk. I did hate the sight o' you once, but I could put up with you now. I don't quite like to ask that Mister Sansover; I think I'll hask Mister Frank."

Stringer turned his project over in his mind for a day, and then decided to appeal to Frank Boyer for assistance. The next morning, wrapping himself in his great-coat and muffler, he set out on the snowy road towards Thorbury Chase. He had set his heart on doing the thing on the sly, so to say. There was a peculiar piquancy to his John-Bull humor in the thought that he — the slow-going, humdrum churchwarden, who knew nothing, and cared to know nothing, of outlandish tongues — was going right among these wicked foreigners, in their very own country, for the purpose of taking from them — as from a legendary dragon's jaws — the book which was their prey at that very moment. He wanted to bring the old Bible back again, and to lay

it on the lectern at night-time when nobody was about; and he wanted the Rector to be told that the old original volume, which had been placed in the church by order of the Bishops in days of yore, was there again, without anybody being able to tell whence it came, or how it got there.

He was walking towards the Chase with brisk and sprightly steps, humming a snatch of an old hymn tune and smiling in complacent self-satisfaction, when on a sudden he saw Mr. Martin White, who was coming towards him from the direction of the Rectory.

The old scholar walked with the elasticity of an ever-green age, and replied to the churchwarden's cheery, "How d'ye do, sir?" with an affable "Thank you, Mr. Stringer, I'm quite well."

The sight of the bibliophile brought a bright idea into Stringer's mind. Here was the very person to do what was required. White was the very man to go abroad with him and buy the book. He was an expert, and even these foreigners, who might cheat Mr. Frank, would not be able to get over White. Stringer resolved to act immediately on the lovely idea which had struck him.

"Going to stay for a while in Thorbury, sir?" he asked.

"I'm going back to-night or to-morrow morning," the old gentleman answered. "I am glad to hear," he added, "that your differences about that Bishops' Bible have been adjusted."

"I'd like to have a talk with you about that same ode Bible, if I may mek so bold as to hask you to come to my house."

Stringer's voice sounded unusually diffident as he

spoke, and he looked into the expert's gray eyes as if he would search them for a favorable answer.

"You're not going to have any more disputes about that book, surely?" Mr. White demanded, raising his eyebrows, and arranging his white cravat as if he were afraid of being asked to undertake a disagreeable task.

"Oh, dear, no, sir!" Stringer answered apologetically. "No fear o' that. But I want you to help me about it," he added half pleadingly; "an', what's more, I don't want the Rector to know nothin' about what you're goin' to help me to do." He looked at White for a moment, and, seeing that the latter made no reply, he continued: "An' it isn't agin the Rector, that you may feel sure on. Quite the contrary."

"You're a strange man, Mr. Stringer!" the bookworm exclaimed smilingly. He had been studying Stringer's appearance as he stood looking at him. There was a change in the churchwarden's voice and manner, rather for the better, White thought, which he could not quite explain.

"Ay, ay — quite so," Stringer retorted. "Theer is them as has got to know me yet. But if you don't mind, Mr. White, an' if you can spare the time, I'd tek it as a favor if you was to come to my house, an' let me talk to you in privit. I'll stay theer waitin' for you all day."

The bibliophile was rather favorably impressed by Stringer's appeal for his assistance, and as his afternoon was not particularly occupied, he promised to call at the churchwarden's house. He also consented to keep the object of his visit secret from the Rector and the Rector's household.

Stringer, when the old gentleman had walked on,

looked after him for a while as if in doubt, and then turned on his heels as proud as a turkey-cock. Things were going swimmingly. He was going to have his own way. He felt half inclined to shout "Hurrah!" but smothered the exclamation which rose to his throat, when, from the top of the hedge on the other side of the road, he saw a pair of round eyes that belonged to the dirty face of a dirty little boy, grinning at him in an idiotic leer. Even that did not upset his good-humor. A month ago he would have shouted at that boy and frightened him out of his wits. Now he simply laughed inwardly, and went home happy and content.

When Stringer reached his residence, he made much ado about the expected visit. The whole household was soon astir with preparations to receive Mr. White with befitting honor.

Stringer made the sudden and surprising discovery that there was not a chair in his parlor big enough and wide enough comfortably to seat so distinguished a person as the London expert, and he ordered Joseph to fetch the big old Queen-Anne, leather-covered armchair—a massive, huge structure like a small room—and to place it by the side of the parlor fire.

Mary pleaded that it was not a bit in keeping with the rest of the furniture, and that there was a very nice and comfortable round armchair there already.

"And he's such a little man, father," she suggested. "He'll be lost in that big thing."

"Don't you think that, Mary," her father replied, stubbornly intent on having his own way. "It's the little men as likes the big things. Look at that Simon Masterman, as isn't much more than a dwarf, an' has married Eva Strange, as is six foot to an inch in her

stockings. You leave that ode cheer theer, Joseph."

Mary might pout just a trifle, but Stringer had to be obeyed. He tried that chair by sitting in it, first on the right, then on the left, then in the centre, and even his burly form barely filled one-half of it.

A proud man was the churchwarden when, a few hours later, Martin White accepted his invitation to be seated in the ancient *fauteuil*. The little man looked like lost in its vast recess, and his legs dangled rather uncomfortably, but Stringer contemplated the result of his scheme as quite an achievement.

He opened the ball in his usually blunt manner.

"Leipzig is a bit far away from here, isn't it?" he asked.

"It is," White replied. "It's in Germany — in Saxony."

This explanation did not convey much information to Mr. Stringer. He scratched the back of his head.

"It'd tek a man a longish bit o' time to get theer, wouldn't it?" he inquired.

"From here it would take about four or five days," was the scholar's answer. "It greatly depends upon the route selected."

Stringer ejaculated a desultory "H'm," and rubbed the carpet with one foot, looking at it as if he were searching there for a phrase which did not quickly suggest itself.

"Ever bin theer?" he exclaimed, raising his eyes.

"Oh, yes," the expert answered, "I know the place well."

"You speak the language, I suppose?" Stringer continued.

"I speak German, if that is what you mean," White exclaimed.

"Queerish sort o' country, Leipzig?" the churchwarden suggested.

White smiled at this peculiar and persistent interrogation.

"Leipzig is not a country, Mr. Stringer," he said. "It is a city."

"Like the city o' London?"

"No, not as big as that — nothing like it."

"Like the city o' York, then?"

"Yes, more like that. Somewhat larger, and more of a business place."

"Let me see," Stringer continued, drawing his chair nearer to where the expert sat. "Do you still work for that firm in London?"

"Yes, I still work for that firm in London," White replied, rather pointedly.

"When you cum here to me, last summer, they charged me five pound a day for you and your hotel expenses, and your travellin' expenses."

The old scholar shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose they did charge you something like that. It is not within my province," he said.

"Would you consider me himpertinent if I was to ask if you've got anything particular to do durin' the next fortnight?" the churchwarden inquired.

"Not that I know of," the bibliophile answered with a smile. "But what is the purpose of your question?"

"Well," Stringer exclaimed diffidently, "I hope as you won't tek it as no hoffence, becos theer's none meant, an' what I want you to do is as I may do what's right by the Rector; an' I'd like to know if your firm

in London would hire you out to me for a fortnight if I was to hask 'em."

He spoke so seriously, and with such intense nervous strain on his words, that Martin White felt that the question was not asked in any spirit of levity.

"My dear Mr. Stringer," he said, "I have no doubt my firm would hire me out to you for a fortnight, as you say, if you were to ask them, and I were to consent. I have no doubt your object is most laudable, but, before consenting, I must be made acquainted with that object."

"I want you to go to Leipzig with me," Stringer answered, "becos it ain't no use my goin' theer by myself, not speakin' their outlandish lingo; an' I want to go theer an' buy the ode Bishops' Bible what those men stole from the Rector, an' left that himitation in its place' what's bin the cause of all the bother in this parish."

"But, Mr. Stringer," White exclaimed in amazement, "that will cost you a lot of money. They are asking six hundred and fifty pounds for the book, and the expenses and my fees would cost you over a hundred pounds more. I would gladly go without any fee, but I'm afraid my employer would not be satisfied without his customary pound of flesh. He looks upon me as an investment which is bound to bring him so much profit in every year."

"Seven hunderd an' fifty pound!" Stringer drawled stolidly. "Say eight hunderd, an' mek sure we've got enough. I hain't got so much money here, but I'll draw it out o' the bank to-morrow. An' if you wouldn't mind arrangin' this business with your people, an' lettin' me know wheer I can meet you as early as you like on Saturday next, we'll start that very day for Leipzig."

I've set my heart on gettin' that book back, an' puttin' it in Thorbury Church, right on the lectern, an' not telling nobody nothin' about it. An' if you'll help me, sir, an' we don't meet with no mishap on the road, that ode Bible shall be theer — God bein' willin' — afore we're three weeks older."

There was an air of droll seriousness and of outspoken honesty about the man which convinced White that in helping him he would aid in a good cause.

"You don't seem to be over-strong just now, Mr. Stringer," he said. "Are not you afraid to travel so far in winter-time? You know it's cold over there — colder than here."

"I reckon as I can get through it," Stringer answered. "I'm stronger than many a young 'un."

"I think we had better go *viâ* Hamburg," the expert suggested. "It will be cheaper, and probably as short as any route, if there is a steamer going on Saturday. Have you ever been to sea, Mr. Stringer?"

The burly one replied with a disconsolate "No."

"You will be very sick, probably," Mr. White continued, by way of encouragement.

"If I've got to be sick, I've got to be," was Stringer's stoical retort, "though I've heerd folks say as theer's lots o' people as goes on ships as niver is sick at all, an' maybe I'm one of 'em."

"Have you any particular house where you stay when you go to London?" the bookworm inquired.

"I generally put up at the Blue Boar in 'Olborn," Stringer answered. "I've bin goin' theer these thirty year."

"Very well," White exclaimed. "I will meet you at the Blue Boar on Saturday next at nine o'clock in the morning. Is that too early for you?"

“Not a bit on it,” Stringer replied. “An’ thank you kindly, sir, for helpin’ me.”

This important matter thus satisfactorily arranged, there remained another to be considered, namely, how to absent himself for so long a time from the village without his absence being noticed and commented on. It would be known that he was going to London to buy Joseph off, and the process of liberating a man who had donned the uniform of her Majesty’s Life Guards was known to be a tedious and intricate one.

Joseph himself did not quite relish the idea of resigning barrack life in London, with its parks, its liberties, and its various amusements, for the quiet and uneventful course of existence in the Midland village. He was too glad, however, of being reconciled to his father to resist the latter’s proposal.

On the next day, Tuesday, quite a family party assembled on Thorbury platform to witness the departure of Isaac Stringer and his son. The churchwarden, provided with rugs and wraps of vast proportions, had fitted himself out for the voyage as if he were about to journey to the North Pole. Mary wiped just a little tear away as she kissed her father and bade him Godspeed. Even Grannie Noble, who stayed behind to take care of Mary, was affected and blubbered. The churchwarden, however, felt as full of ardor and valorous excitement as if he were going on some mission of derring-do. The French conscript journeying to his regiment, excited by the generous vintage of his village, and dreaming of the proverbial *maréchal’s bâton* that was to lie hidden in his knapsack, could not possibly be, momentarily, more elated than Stringer was when the engine puffed and screamed, and the train moved out of Thorbury

Station amid a cloud of white steam and the agitated fluttering of a little covey of handkerchiefs.

"I'm a-goin' to be a furriner, Joseph," he said, "just for a while. I wonder what it feels like, bein' a furriner."

CHAPTER XXXV.

JOSEPH had returned to his barracks, and the initial negotiations for his discharge from Her Majesty's service had been completed. There was every prospect that within a month Joseph would be able to return to Thorbury freed from army discipline.

Isaac Stringer had found his time considerably occupied, and Friday evening had come before he hardly knew it. He had received a note from White informing him that the expert had taken passages for himself and Stringer on board the Hamburg Company's steamship *Elbe*, which was to sail from St. Katharine's Docks at eleven o'clock Saturday morning. "I think that this information will be sufficient for you," the bibliophile had added, "and that it will be unnecessary for me to call at the Blue Boar. Any cab will take you to St. Katharine's Docks, and I will meet you at the steamer's side at half-past ten o'clock to-morrow (Saturday) morning."

Stringer longed and pined for the old gentleman's society, and this slight delay was a disappointment to him. He carried his money in a stout leather belt which he had strapped around his body underneath his shirt, but even with that precaution he did not care to venture far away from his hostelry at night. He therefore found a comfortable armchair in the old-fashioned oak-wainscoted smoking-room, where, with a steaming glass of toddy in front of him, and a long clay pipe between his

fingers, he was soon engaged in converse with rustic notabilities like himself, some of whom he had met on previous occasions. When these were informed that, on the morrow, Stringer was about to venture into foreign climes, they looked upon him with deference and awe, and the churchwarden became the object of the most obsequious courtesy and attention. The upshot of all this was that Stringer imbibed several more glasses of toddy than he was accustomed to at Thorbury, and to these several toddies others were added when the smoking-room was closed and the cronies were driven to resort to the bar. Each and every one insisted that Stringer should partake of a separate stirrup-cup with him. Stringer's eyes became bleary, and his speech thick and muddled, his movements erratic, and he held on to the window-sill as a shipwrecked mariner clings to a floating spar for safety. Luckily for him, the moment came when even the bar was closed, and Stringer, with the night-porter on one side of him and the barman on the other, thought he walked, but in fact was rather carried, upstairs, where the two servants deposited him on his bed, and after pulling off his coat and his boots, left him singing at the top of his voice :

“It's my delight of a shiny night
In the season of the year.”

The morrow's awakening brought the evening's revenge. As Stringer sat up on his bed, shivering, with the sheet and coverlet twisted in seemingly inextricable confusion about him, he thought that his head had grown several sizes too big for him, and that there was something within it which hammered against his cranium in its efforts to get out. He felt the offending member

of his anatomy all over, in the vague imagining that, somehow or other, he had got possessed of a head other than his own.

The cool air of his bedroom soon roused him from his phantasy, and he became aware, in a practical matter-of-fact manner, that his present state was due to the extraordinary imbibings of the previous night. He did not quite dare to risk his usual remedy in similar cases, cold tub, and sat for a long while with his legs dangling, and his hands folded in front of him, a picture of abject misery. The ticking of his watch brought him to a sense of what was expected from him that day. Time and his duties forced themselves upon his perturbed mind, and he shook himself together with an involuntary tremor of self-contempt for having allowed himself to be so misled. A solid breakfast of hot tea, sausages, toast nearly swimming in butter, and some rare cold streaky roast pork, made him feel like himself again.

The morning fog was just lifting, and the spirelet of St. Sepulchre was glistening in the sun, when Stringer, having stowed his voluminous luggage within and without a four-wheeler, was driven down Holborn and up Snowhill, and thence through Newgate Street and Cheapside into the maze of busy little streets leading to St. Katharine's Docks. He reached the side of the steamer *Elbe* after various more or less angry discussions with officials, touts, and porters, and there found Mr. White waiting for him. He had never been aboard of an ocean-going steamer, and everything on the ship was new, and curious, and interesting, though it did smell, as he said, "beastly of oil and tar." He felt quite a sailor, walking up and down the upper deck as the vessel lay still in dock; and as the *Elbe* moved into the

river, and steamed along majestically, and no qualms of stomach forced themselves intrusively upon him, he was sure that the trip to Hamburg would be productive of invigorating pleasure to him.

The weather was really beautiful for winter-time. A slight grayish haze pearled upon the waters, but over it and through it the sun shone with resplendent glory, a ball of red fire sending its prismatic light to dance in the air in millions upon millions of shining atoms. There was just enough breeze to make its contact refreshing, and, as the *Elbe* steamed to the mouth of the Thames, Stringer, at White's suggestion, went downstairs into the cabin to partake of dinner.

It remained a mystery to the churchwarden to the end of his days, when and where the inexplicable movement commenced which transformed him from a man endowed with all the courage of a stubborn race, into a limp, useless, helpless, and broken-down piece of humanity. He never finished that dinner, and never knew how he got to his cabin, where he found himself lying in his bunk, while a sailor performed for him various friendly offices. He had been sick several times before, very sick, but he vowed that never previous to that day had he known what it was to be really ill. He wished from the bottom of his heart that he had never thought of going to Hamburg. He wished that there were no such town as Hamburg, and no steamer to take a man there. He wished he were in Jericho, in a cage full of lions — anywhere but on that vessel. He would have given all he was worth, and all he was ever likely to be worth, to be on terra firma again; and if anybody had come to him at that moment telling him that the ship was about to go down into the depths of

the sea, he would have blessed his stars at being thus relieved of his affliction. It was no longer a wonder to him that foreigners were such peculiar people, if they were all exposed to such trials as this.

The weary, horrible day, and the wearier, more horrible night, that he passed! How that abominable ship pitched and rolled, and rolled and pitched, making his very heart stand on end, and his stomach a blasphemy of uselessness and torture. During one terrible moment, when, with eyes starting from their sockets, he gasped for breath, he looked at the little porthole as if seeking a spot whence, by any means, to escape from the pains that racked him and seemed to break him up altogether.

The next day, as bright and sunshiny as the previous one, brought a slight amelioration, and by and by Stringer gained sufficient strength to allow White to drag him to the open deck, where he sat with the flaps of his travelling-cap tucked over his ears, and with his rugs wrapped around his legs, open-mouthed, and looking about him as helplessly as a babe.

"Will I be as sick as this when I'm a-comin' back?" he asked White in a wheeny, whining voice.

"No, most likely not," the latter replied cheerily. "You've got to buy your sea-legs, you see. Perhaps the next time you mayn't be sick at all."

"I hope so," the churchwarden whispered.

The thought had suggested itself to him that if he were again to be subjected to such tortures, would it not be wiser not to go back at all?

The fresh breeze and the glorious sun soon did wonders with Stringer, and, in less than an hour, he had thrown off his wraps and was walking slowly up and

down the deck on White's arm; and by the time they reached the mouth of the Elbe, Stringer had forgotten all about his pains and ills, and felt himself quite a sailor, ready to brave the sea and its terrors again at any moment.

They stayed at Hamburg over-night, and the quaint buildings of the free Hanseatic town looked to Stringer like bits from old prints he had seen at different times. The waiters in the hotel where they stopped spoke English, and Stringer referred pointedly to the fact that he could make himself understood quite as well as in England, and that these foreigners were not such savages after all.

He was undeceived next morning when, at the railway-station, in the momentary absence of Mr. White, a big, burly, mustachioed gendarme, with a great sabre at his side, said something to him in a tone of command which he did not comprehend. Stringer, with a complacent smile and a slight nod, said that he did not at all understand, and was about to move on, when the pompous official, with an exclamation which sounded to Stringer like a grunt, caught the churchwarden by the shoulder and roughly twisted him back again, chattering and gesticulating furiously. It would have been difficult to say what would have been the result of this altercation, had not White appeared on the scene as a mediator and restorer of peace, explaining to Mr. Stringer that the man had been merely doing his duty in preventing the churchwarden from walking into the ladies' private room.

"Then why couldn't he say so?" Stringer exclaimed in his wrath. "What's the good of jabbering in a language that no man can hunderstand? Why don't

they write it up plain, 'Ladies' Room,' instead of all sorts of rubbidge what's got no meaning to it?"

The German second-class carriages of that period were so far superior to English means of locomotion of a similar kind, that Stringer's good-temper returned speedily. He found himself in a soft-cushioned and soft-backed, gray-cloth-upholstered compartment, which seemed to him the acme of railway accommodation. He was a little nonplussed at the ticket-collectors, who walked along the footboards, and put their heads in at the carriage-windows while the train was moving at full speed, and wondered that they did not tumble off or get smashed.

To Stringer's eyes everything he saw—the people, the buildings, the food, the drink, and especially the soldiers that swarmed at nearly every railway-station—appeared novel and curious. He did not care for the beer, and considered it washy. He still less liked the wine, which he described as weak vinegar. The bread was rather more to his fancy, but the uncooked ham of the railway buffets did not at all meet with his approval. He had often at Thorbury partaken of German sausage, and was wofully disappointed to find that he could get none at the refreshment-rooms. German pastry, however, he thought wonderful, and managed to exist throughout the day on products of the confectioner's art.

Communication in those days was neither as direct nor as speedy as it is now. Twice White and Stringer had to stop at places the very names of which the churchwarden could not harbor in his memory. They arrived at Leipzig in the middle of the night, and Stringer was glad to stretch his weary limbs on a huge

feather-bed which he considered much too soft. Early the next morning White went out by himself on a reconnoitring expedition to the shop of Messieurs Ehrenfest Brothers, the booksellers who were in possession of the Thorbury Bible.

Stringer, left by himself in the vast coffee-room, looked out upon the busy street. The house opposite, with its projecting diamond-paned windows, its little gables, its gargoyles, and other grotesque carvings, with its tarnished gilt iron scroll-work, with its general appearance of venerable old age, reminded Stringer of houses he had seen in English cathedral towns. The crowd, too, that hurried to and fro, did not differ much from what he was accustomed to see — in Birmingham, for instance. The only difference he noticed particularly was in the uniforms of the soldiers.

He stood at the big window watching amusedly, and the time did not seem at all long, yet he was eager for White to return and report the result of his inquiries. His crisp Bank of England notes were in his belt, and he had been told, with truth, that these were current coin anywhere. He did not propose to haggle much. These men had come by the book by unlawful means, and he, personally, did not intend to demean himself by bargaining with them. That would have been to acknowledge their rights, but he had some slight misgivings lest these unconscionable foreign booksellers, finding him too eager to buy, were to raise their price beyond the sum he had about him.

White returned in about half an hour.

“You can go and make your own bargain, Mr. Stringer,” he said. “I have been there and examined the book, and find it the genuine Thorbury Bishops’

Bible, beautifully restored and quite perfect. The binding is modern, but you have the old oak, leather-covered boards in Thorbury, and can have them easily refitted. Mr. Heinrich Ehrenfest has lived in England, and speaks English. You can therefore carry on your own negotiations, and I will be there to assist you in any way I can."

Stringer would have much preferred not to have anything to do with the matter except pay the price.

"I ain't no hand at bargaining with them sharpin' foreigners," he said. "I'd much rather you'd do it for me, if so you be willin'!"

The expert insisted, however, that the arrangement he proposed was best, and the churchwarden accompanied him reluctantly to Messieurs Ehrenfest's shop. Stringer had formed no particular idea of the kind of person he was likely to meet, but he was taken considerably aback on discovering that Herr Heinrich Ehrenfest was an imposing and portly gentleman, with a face like an English bishop's, smooth-shaven except for slight white whiskers, and with his shining bald head encircled by a rim of white hair. He wore a black frock-coat, a black satin waistcoat, and a spotless white neckcloth, above which his collar shone of ivory-white. Quite a bunch of massive gold seals dangled from his fob, a big signet-ring glittered on his finger, and Mr. Stringer, who had come to the place fully and savagely intent to "let 'em have it straight an' no mistek about it," felt instinctively that he would nearly as lief have said rude things to the Archbishop of Canterbury as to Mr. Heinrich Ehrenfest, who received him in the most pompously courteous manner imaginable.

"I am very sorry, sar," the Leipzig bookseller com-

menced, "that we are not able to dedooct motch from the brice of de Bishops' Bible. I haf olreaty exblained to Mister White dat we can get eight hoondred pounds for it in München, bot I haf consoolted wit my pardners, and we will take fife hoondred pounds sterling. We want to make no brofit."

Here was a marvel of marvels! He had come to Leipzig fully prepared to pay six hundred and fifty pounds, and he was going to be let off by expending five hundred. Of course it was a lot to pay, in any case, to regain property which had been stolen; but that deduction of a hundred and fifty pounds made him take quite a liking to the people who had treated him so leniently. He was afraid that they might repent themselves of their offer, and was not content till he felt the volume tucked away under his arm in return for five notes of one hundred pounds each. He neither asked for nor would take a receipt. That looked to him like compounding a felony, he said.

When he walked out into the street with his treasure in his possession a new fear sprang upon him. What if he lost the book? What if it were stolen from him? His eager craving now was to get away from the place, and to get home again as speedily as possible.

"That's a very nice-spoken gentleman," Stringer said, fondling and admiring his newly recovered treasure when they had reached the hotel.

"Very," the old scholar replied curtly.

"He let me off cheap," Stringer continued, taken slightly aback by the brevity of the remark.

"Yes, quite cheap," White answered.

Stringer looked at his companion with a nonplussed air, and then went on:

"My heart went down clean into my boots when he said that he could get eight hundred pound for the book at that place — what's its name?"

"Oh, yes, he said that," the expert answered in the tone he had previously adopted.

"Then don't you think it's very kind o' him," the churchwarden asked, not knowing what to make of White's manner, "to tek five hundred for it from me?"

"Very kind," was the short reply.

"Theer's something as you're a-keepin' back, sir," Stringer suggested tremulously. "Theer's something as ain't quite square. Ain't the Bible worth five hundred pounds?"

"Oh, it is worth more than that," the bibliophile answered. "You can make your mind easy on that subject."

"Well," the baffled interlocutor exclaimed, "I'll be bothered if I can mek heads or tails of it. What made him that kind an' that forbearin' that he teks five hundred pound from me for a book as he can sell for eight hundred? I don't know what you think, sir, but I tek it as very generous, I do."

"Mr. Ehrenfest knows which side his bread is buttered," the old scholar answered. "He did not reduce his price without sufficient reason."

"Oh, theer was other reasons, then?" Stringer asked. A light dawned upon him, and he smiled his proudest as he proclaimed his discovery. "It's you, sir, what made him do it, I'll bargain. I'd like to bet a fiver agin a five-shillin' piece as it's you what made him do it."

"Well, I fancy I exercised some influence on his decision," White remarked casually.

"Didn't I tell you so?" Stringer exclaimed gleefully. "I guessed all along as it was you."

His admiration for the old scholar assumed astonishing proportions. He had previously looked upon him as a man of vast learning, research, and experience; but now White became quite a mighty magician to his mind.

"I s'pose you wouldn't mind tellin' me, sir," he faltered, "if it ain't a business secret, becos it gets over me how you got over that Mister — what d'ye call 'im?"

"It is a very simple affair," the expert replied; "and there is no secret whatever about it. I hold permanent commissions from the richest and most extensive English buyers of rare books. I told Mr. Ehrenfest candidly that I would throw his catalogues into the waste-paper basket if he did not deal fairly by you. Last year my customers spent over five thousand pounds with him. This makes me believe that my statement had some weight with him when he fixed the price of your Bible."

"I'm much beholden to you, sir," Stringer exclaimed warmly. "Not as I mind the money. That ain't so much. But it's the hidea of beatin' them mean furriners as does me good. I'm that pleased I don't know what to say. Let's have a bottle o' port, sir, an' then we'll have a try an' get out of this country an' back to hold England as quick as ever we can."

White decided to return to London *via* Cologne and Brussels. There was no steamer from Hamburg to London for two days, and, besides that, the short sea route would be better for Stringer, with his limited maritime experience.

It was a long, cold, and tedious journey, and the churchwarden thought he would never get to the end of it. He had made a separate parcel of the treasured

volume, and nursed it in all his waking hours along the road as a woman would a baby. He never closed an eye without either sitting or lying on it, and when he stepped from the steamer on to the pier at Dover, he thanked Providence for having allowed him to bring his English Bible safely home again to English shores.

With his foot on English ground he felt comparatively safe, but he did not breathe freely until he had entered his own house at Thorbury and had locked up his book in his strong-box upstairs.

He was not going to satisfy idle curiosity, however, by breathing aught about the success of his journey. To the kindest and most cleverly worded inquiries he gave mystifying and evasive answers. He wanted to consider well, and choose an appropriate and fitting manner to restore the old book to the church.

To Mary and to Grannie Noble he became a greater marvel than ever. Not an unkindly word escaped his lips, and his child, who had so dreaded him, wondered how she could ever have been actuated by such feeling.

One afternoon, while transacting some business at his bank at Castle Barfield, he wrote out a check to bearer for eighty-five pounds, and handed it to the receiving cashier.

“Please pay that in to Dr. Hay’s account,” he said.

“Shall I enter it as paid by you, sir?” the clerk asked.

“No; enter it as ‘cash,’” Stringer replied, and walked away.

“That meks my mind just a little easier now,” he said to himself, as he drove home; “an’ if it weren’t for them blind eyes of his it would be quite easy. But I can’t buy him his sight agin — that I can’t!”

He was sombre and silent all along the road back, and Mary, who was sitting by his side, puzzled her little head at what was the matter with her father.

“I hope you’re not ill?” she exclaimed anxiously.

“No, Mary,” he replied, “I ain’t ill. But I’ve bin a-thinkin’ what an awful job it is when you’ve done a thing as you can’t undo, an’ as you’re downright sorry for. Tek heed o’ what I’m tellin’ you. Don’t you iver judge a man hastily an’ by happearances, becos happearances is deceivin’, my dear.”

Mary, for a moment, thought her father was alluding to Cornelius Badger, and her conscience smote her.

“I never will again, father,” she whispered. “You were right in that, and I was wrong. I promise you, I never will again.”

Stringer had to think twice or thrice before he could grasp his daughter’s meaning. When it struck him suddenly, he could not help smiling in spite of himself.

“Ah, Mary,” he said, “it would be a good thing if all men’s mistakes did no more mischief than yours — no more mischief than yours,” he repeated, and was again lost in thought.

“I can’t buy him his sight agin! I can’t buy him his sight agin!” was the phrase that kept dinning in his ears all that afternoon.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

EARLY in the following week the village of Thorbury was much puzzled about a quiet-looking, quiet-spoken young man, whom Stringer went to meet *in propria personâ* at the railway-station and escorted to his house. He was a tallish young man, pale-faced and sandy-haired, and rather nervous in his manner. He brought a large wooden box with him, and the know-alls about the village related that Stringer had had the top front-room of his house specially prepared for him.

The pale-faced young man was the principal assistant of a well-known London bookbinder. Stringer, with the Rector's experience of Messieurs Reinemann and MacWraith fresh in his mind, promised himself that he would not let the book out of his sight this time, and, with the assistance of Mr. White, he had induced one of the most famous artists in the book-binding trade to send his most expert workman to Thorbury, so that the old Bible might be refitted in its oak boards without quitting his house. White had experienced great difficulty in this case. The great London book-binders first of all laughed at the idea as preposterous and unusual. They had had books of far greater value than the Thorbury Bible in their care over and over again, and White had to exert all his personal influence to get one of them to consent to humor Mr. Stringer. The fee demanded seemed prohibitive and exorbitant, but the churchwarden accepted the terms with eagerness, glad

to see the work done under his own eyes at any price.

One afternoon of the week following his return from Leipzig, Stringer, with his treasure neatly tied up in brown paper under his arm, walked to Thorbury Chase. The imitation left behind them by Messrs. Reinemann and MacWraith with the original antique binding was still in the Squire's care. Stringer had set his heart on having it returned to him without the Rector being made aware of the fact.

As luck would have it, Marmaduke Boyer was at home alone.

"I reckon, Squire, you've still got that theer book as I left with you last summer," Stringer said when the usual courtesies had been passed.

"What book?" Boyer demanded.

"That forged Bible," the churchwarden answered diffidently.

"Oh dear! oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!" Boyer exclaimed impatiently; "I thought I'd heard the last of that book. Can't you leave well alone, Stringer? I thought you had made it up with the Rector, and shaken hands, and all that."

Stringer's round face creamed with inward satisfaction.

"So I have, Squire; so I have!" he cried.

"Then what on earth do you want with that book?" the Squire asked. "It's done mischief enough already, goodness knows!"

"It won't do no more mischief," Stringer replied, with a broad grin on his face; "I'll tek good care it don't do no more mischief."

"Then what do you want to do with it?" Boyer insisted.

Stringer, for all reply, untied the strings of his parcel and took his book from its paper coverings. He laid it on the table before him with care and ceremony.

"Look at that, Squire," he said, pointing proudly to the Bible.

"Well, what of it?" was the rather impatient rejoinder.

"Look at it, Squire! look at it!" the churchwarden insisted, opening the book and fingering the leaves, as if he were fondling them.

"By Jove! it looks to me like another copy of the Bishops' Bible!" Marmaduke Boyer exclaimed.

"Another copy!" Stringer retorted with a contemptuous sneer — "another copy! It's the real, genuine ode book what's bin in our church this three hunderd year or more; what them men stole, an' what I've got back agin."

"Bravo, you! You're a brick, Stringer!" Boyer cried, slapping Stringer on the shoulder: "I'm beginning to think better of you."

"Beginnin'?" Stringer commented. "I hope as I'll mek you think better o' me afore I'm many a day oder. I've got th' ode book here, an' you've got th' ode book bindin' on that theer rubbishy thing, an' I've got a chap down from London to put the two together. An' I've made him bring his tools with him, an' do it in my own house, afore my own eyes; an' if that book's stole agin while the job's bein' done, you may blame Isaac Stringer, an' he'll bear it."

"Dr. Hay *will* be glad when he hears all this," Boyer suggested.

"I hope Dr. Hay won't hear nothin' about it," Stringer replied. "I want to do this thing my own way, and I

want you to keep a close tongue about it, Squire, even from Mr. Frank. I've set my heart on it, I have."

"So you want me to humor you?" Boyer said cheerily, standing with legs wide apart in front of the glowing chimney fire. "Well, I dare say you must have your own way."

There was such a merry twinkle in Boyer's eye as he spoke, such a mischievous glitter, which Stringer at one moment thought was a sly wink of self-communication, that the churchwarden did not feel quite sure of the Squire's sincerity in that promise of secrecy. He reconciled himself, however, by the thought that it would not be long before all Thorbury might know what had been done.

He went home with two prizes under his arm instead of one. The bookbinder from London was waiting for him, in his upstairs front room.

"Them's the two books, young man," Stringer said, laying the two volumes on the table. "That's the real book, an' that's the real bindin'; an' now, if you please, sir, I'll get you to take the bindin' off that himitation book."

The workman, inserting one of his tools here and there between the binding and the front leaves, and making a neat and swift incision on each side of the volume, stripped the covering off with a speed and skill which to Stringer seemed extraordinary, and stood with the oak boards in one hand and the vellum leaves in the other.

"I'll tek them bits o' shipskin," Stringer said quietly; "an' now you can set to work, an' fit the good book into the good cover."

The rebinding of the old Bible in its former casing

proved a far more lengthy job than Stringer had anticipated. He sat there hour after hour and watched the workman's movements, as a cat would watch a mouse. When evening came, he collected the leaves and the boards in whatever state they were, and wrapping them in a big silk handkerchief, he carried them to his strong-box downstairs. In the morning he brought them back again. When the workman went to his meals in the kitchen, Stringer, after locking the room door and putting the key in his pocket, accompanied him thither.

In spite of all these precautions, Stringer's bed was far from being a couch of down and rose-leaves, while this work was progressing in his house. He would rise in the middle of the night, and go to his strong-box and take out the book. He would take out the loose leaves and look at them one by one, and replace them in happy contentment on finding they were all there.

In antique vellum, nearly every sheet has its peculiarity, and Stringer soon got to know the particular marks of every leaf of the old Bible. That page had a brown spot on the top, that other one a little blackish mark at the bottom. Another one had a tiny round hole near the outer edge, and still another one, a kind of knot at the bottom corner. He studied all these with the glad and fond attention a botanist may bestow upon the first sprouting of hybridized seeds, and it would have been difficult, after a while, for a single forged page to have been substituted for a genuine one without his being aware of it.

At last the work was finished, the workman paid, and the old Bible lay in all its complete beauty in front of Stringer. Never did frail beauty more fondly caress a pet animal than Stringer did his Bible.

Still another difficulty had to be overcome. The church was locked at night-time, and Habakkuk had the key. Habakkuk must be taken into the secret, and although Stringer did not like the idea, he needs must make the best of it. In this emergency Stringer had a happy thought—he would buy Habakkuk's silence. Habakkuk was getting old—very old; his wage was small, and out of it he could afford no luxuries.

Now, at the Fox and Dogs they had some rare old East India sherry. It had been in the place longer than the landlord could remember, and on occasions of importance mine host would produce that noble vintage with a solemnity befitting an offering of liquidized pearls. Stringer knew that Habakkuk's great and only weakness was that old sherry, and that the old man looked upon it with the longing of the poor shepherd who loves a princess, and knows that she is beyond his reach.

To the Fox and Dogs Isaac Stringer bent his steps that day, and he left the hostelry again with a bottle of the fine old sherry stuck in each of the side-pockets of his overcoat. From the inn to Habakkuk Wood's cottage was not a long distance, and the churchwarden, having walked briskly, felt himself quite in a happy glow as he opened the door and saw the sexton sitting at his table, with his spectacles on his eyes, busily engaged on mending a pair of trousers. He greeted the old man with a jolly "Good-morning," and was answered in the same hearty manner.

"Coldish weather still," Stringer exclaimed, slapping his gloved hands against one another.

The sexton sniffed the air as if it bore a peculiar odor.

"Coldish," he replied. "Come in, gaffer, and shut the door. What's the news this mornin'?"

"Nothin' in partickler," Stringer answered. "I thought I'd give you a look in. It is coldish, though, isn't it?"

Habakkuk looked out of the window upon the field opposite, where the first blades of grass were sprouting, and without knowing what to make of his guest's persistence, gave a grunt of assent.

"As you say, gaffer, it is coldish."

Stringer, with a pompous effort, pulled one of the bottles out of his pocket, and held it in front of him.

"I've bin thinkin', Habakkuk," he said, "in this cold weather — though it is early in the mornin' — that a glass of that fine old sherry what Hobson sells at the Fox an' Dogs wouldn't do no harm to you, nor to me neither."

The old man's eyes glistened.

"Thee don't mean to say, Isaac Stringer," he exclaimed, "that that's a bottle o' that same old sherry?"

"It is, Habakkuk," Stringer replied.

"A whole bottle on it?"

"Yes, a whole bottle."

"An' you want me to tek a glass o' that with you?" the sexton asked, rising and greedily eying the pleasant temptation which Stringer held in his hand.

"If you ain't got nothin' to say agin it, I would like to tek a glass o' that with thee," was Stringer's answer.

The sexton, without another word, went to the cupboard and produced two tumblers and a corkscrew.

"I haven't nothin' smaller in the house," he said, placing the glasses on the table while Stringer uncorked the bottle.

When the fine old liquor had been tasted and sipped, Stringer put on the table the bottle which had remained in his pocket.

"I want you to do me a service, Habakkuk," he said.

"Willin'ly, willin'ly," the sexton replied, barely taking his glass from his lips.

"I want you to lend me the key o' the church to-night."

The sexton put down his glass, and looked the churchwarden straight in the face.

"Wha' for?" he asked.

"I'll tell thee," Stringer said quietly, "but thee mustn't tell nobody else. I've got th' ode Bishops' Bible back agin an' I've got a new silver chain, an' I want to go into the church and fix the book on to the lectern, so that it may be found theer, an' nobody know how it got theer."

"An' when do you want to do that?" Habakkuk inquired.

"To-night," Stringer answered, "as soon as it's dark."

"Here's the key!" the old man exclaimed, throwing it on the table. "Thee can tek that; I've got another."

Stringer fancied that he saw in Habakkuk's eye a mischievous gleam similar to that he had noticed in that of the Squire. He reflected a moment, and then concluded that it was merely a fancy.

"I didn't want to have the look o' bribin' you, Habakkuk," he said; "but now if you want to keep those two bottles o' sherry, you can."

Those two bottles of sherry he felt sure would seal Habakkuk's lips.

That same night Stringer crept into Thorbury Church stealthily, as if he were about to commit a guilty act, and screwed the little silver eyelet which held the silver chain of the old Bible into the oak of the lectern. Then he locked the door again and stole away.

Next day, on coming down to breakfast, he found a little note on the table informing him that a special service would be held that morning at eleven o'clock, and inviting his presence. He read the notice with trepidation, and went to the church with Mary in a dread lest his secret was known.

His secret was known. The special service was held by the Rector as a thanksgiving for the restoration of the Holy Book to Thorbury Church, and for the ending of the dissensions which had made the parish unhappy.

And when at the finish of the service, everybody pressed around Stringer, and thanked him, and congratulated him, he felt rather glad that the parish knew that he had done what little he could to retrieve his fault.

Yet as he lay abed on many a quiet night, in the midst of his contentment, the words rang in his ears: "I can't buy his sight back agin!"

L'ENVOI.

SPRINGTIME come again, with its sprouting grass, its budding leaves, and its early flowers — beautiful, balmy spring.

Thorbury Church is decorated as though for a festival, and filled by a glad congregation, for at the altar-rails kneel Frank Boyer and Ophelia, whose hands the Rector joins in holy matrimony.

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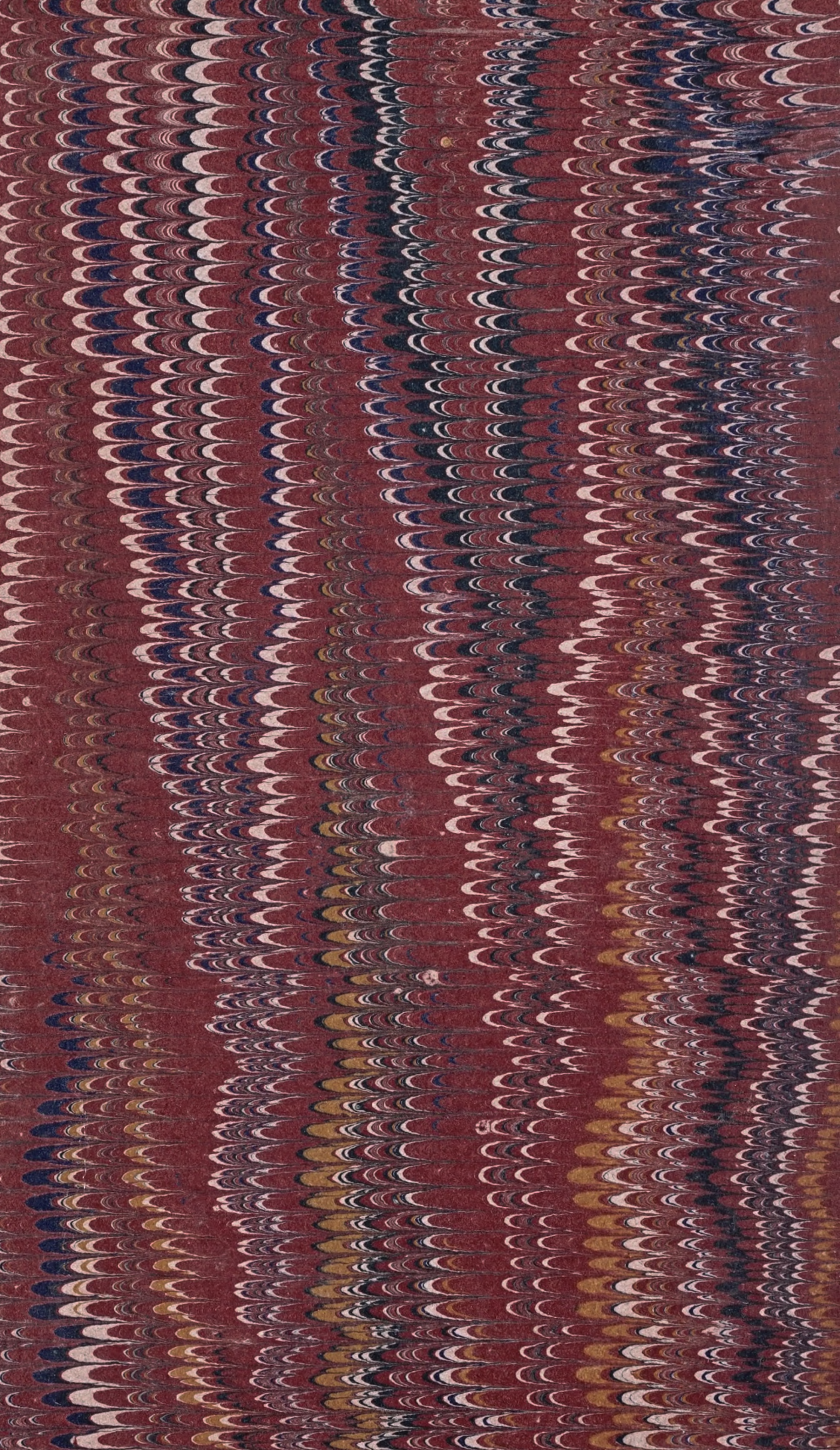


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To secure the most delicate and refined perfume from the rose, it is necessary to discard the green central bulb. The above picture, reproduced from a photograph, shows a large number of girls and women seated around tables piled high with roses, engaged in stripping off the leaves.

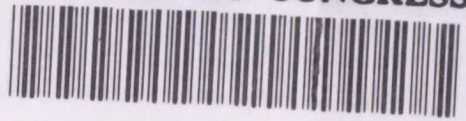
Although this is a very tedious and expensive operation, yet Colgate & Co., each year, have millions of roses separately handled and stripped of their leaves, to obtain the most delicate odor for their unrivalled soaps and perfumes, the favorite of which is

Cashmere Bouquet





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